

Victory of the Cross

By Paris Reidhead*

Not as a text but as an anchor point for our thinking, I would have you turn to I Corinthians chapter 2. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth and alluding in this portion that I am to read, verses 1 through 8, alluding to far more than he develops. It is developed elsewhere in the Scripture, but he makes it the foundation upon which certain very vital, very important issues in the Christian life. Therefore, I would simply acquaint you with this portion that it might become a platform for our thinking this morning.

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

There is a tendency to ascribe omniscience to Satan. He is not omniscient. He is an individual that has remarkable powers, supernatural abilities, indeed; he may not have the exact measure of them, but we know that he is not omniscient; he does not know everything, and he has in times past over-reached himself. When he does allude to the fact that had the princes of this world known that to which he referred, had they known it in advance, certainly then it would not have transpired as it did. It alludes to an ancient conflict, a conflict which must be rightly understood if we are to have a proper relationship to the truths of God and to the provisions of the grace of God. Now what I am giving you this morning has been given in some measure as it will be presented in the past. I have no notes before me as you will see, and I am not repeating a sermon, but I am sharing with you truths which I feel is foundational to a proper understanding of our relationship to Jesus Christ, and I think that it is imperative that you should lay good hold upon it. Now I might be accused or erecting my own metaphysical system, and I certainly am not going to claim special revelation to some of the things that I say, but I do feel that they are at least relevant, they can be related to the scriptures and I give them without apology.

I am very interested that you should begin, if you have not already done so, and certainly many of you have, that you should begin to think your way into the scripture for yourselves. I am afraid that too many of us have been rather like a dove, sitting on the edge of the nest waiting for the pastor to come with the regurgitated truth that he can give, that has been pre-digested, and all he is expecting of the people is that they should eat it, sit there and listen if you please, and then as the result of their listening, at least remember a few catch phrases and clichés, but if you have attended upon the ministry of this pulpit for any length of time, you are acquainted with the fact that I have systematically sought to avoid erecting such clichés. I have endeavored, at least, not to give you any pat little formulas, with one or two exceptions, because I feel that the formulas I am giving you, have given you in the past are essential for a proper understanding of the foundation of the ministry of the pulpit. But at the same time we are trying to avoid stimulating in you cliché responses, stereotype responses. We want you to think for yourself.

Many Christians have never known the exquisite joy that come from going into the Word, having God speak to their heart through the Word. Dr. Tozer¹ in one of his editorials said that a book fills its purpose best when it becomes a ramp up which you run in order to become airborne through your own thinking. And I think that is the way with a sermon. It should have the effect of stimulating you to do your own thinking, to do your own studying, to do your own meditating until God makes it real to your heart, and therefore I would just have it given to you in this way.

¹ Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

May I make this further personal testimony along with it. I was one of the products of indoctrination, good indoctrination by good people, but I was systematically and regularly indoctrinated for the first, at least, 14 years of my ministry. I belonged to a fine Sunday School and was saved in clear preaching of the Word and attended a splendid church and an excellent Bible School, but the net result of all of this was that they had just given me truth layer upon layer of truth, and in 1949 when I returned from Africa, in the midst of my personal failure and defeat, I knew it was imperative that I take spiritual inventory, and I did so in a period down in Louisville, Kentucky when, not as a student, I had matriculated but had not attended any classes. I knew that what they offered there wasn't going to meet my particular need, but I stayed in the seminary men's dormitory for about 6 weeks and had an opportunity there in the quiet of this restful period to have a time of spiritual inventory, and I discovered that my life had layer after layer after layer of the leaves off of other men's trees. They had been green and rich on the other men, but as far as I was concerned they were just words, just ideas, just doctrines that I had plucked off of their branches when they bent low in their preaching, and I had taken them out of their books and off of their branches and I laid them in on my heart. Oh, I learned the phrases; I had more or less adequate, at least for the company that I kept, adequate theological vocabulary and could define the terms I used and find scripture verses to corroborate the terms, but it was all exterior, it was all objective, it was all in my mind. Here I had come back from the mission field, a personal failure, and had learned that 98% of the problems on the mission field, incidentally, are personality problems. And I wanted to find an answer to it.

I remember plowing through these years of accumulated teachings until finally I found something God had made real in my own life. You know what it was? This was 1949. I went down through the years on the mission field, went down through the years in Bible training, in pastoral work, and all that was, for the most part, let's say an Ivory Soap percentage, 99-44/100% just accepted and hadn't become real, and I got down to the last real thing that ever happened to me with God. Do you know what it was? It was the first real thing that ever happened to me - the first and the last. I was born of God. That was real. And fortunately it was, if it hadn't been I would have gone right out into agnosticism or atheism. I was determined that I wasn't going to fool myself any longer. I had to be real.

The last thing that was real was the day that I was born of God. That was real, and from then on the very next day, they began to put these ideas and words and truths and doctrines in on my heart until they built up this theological compost crib that had been absolutely unprofitable through all these years. And finally I had to plow through, push through to find reality and begin again. And I determined then and there, that from that time on, what came had to be real, it had to come from God. If my progress was ever so slow, it was going to have to be real. I was going to distinguish between that which my intellect could understand and my heart had experienced. I made that distinction and I was never going to let the blue haze come again. It had to be real.

And the consequence of it was that I began to go to the word to prepare a missionary message. From Matthew the 9th chapter I shall never forget, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he will thrust out laborers into the harvest field." Oh, I had books that I purchased and began to go into the Greek. Didn't know anything about it, but I was working with the crutches that I could afford and could obtain in doing the best I could, and if I began to parse that "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He would thrust forth--" I came to a construction in the Greek that overwhelmed me, and it was this - it was an aorist subjunctive. Now that may not mean anything to you, but it didn't mean much to me until I looked it up and found out what Robertson had to say about it. And he said it makes it purposive, and that way it seemed to me it ought to be translated "Pray ye the lord of the harvest in order that He will be able to thrust out laborers". Now that was fantastic. None of the commentaries and libraries said that, so I worked it out with all the helps I could get, and I took it to the head of the Greek department at Southern Baptist Seminary and said, "Look at this, is that right, this wrong". Three days later he said, "Come here I want to talk to you about that." He said, "That's right, but I would be afraid to handle it. It is just too hot for me to handle, because it opens the door to so many things that none of the rest of the commentators are prepared to handle." "Well," I said, "I have nothing to lose by it, I have -- no one thinks I am a scholar, so I am going to go ahead with it and enjoy it, see where it leads me." He said, "Well you do it, let me know." I never have, but I just as soon.

"Pray ye the Lord of the harvest" and I began to say, now what is this, here is a village in Africa. I was particularly concerned about Africa. I had come from 10 tribes that hadn't had a missionary, and He said "Pray ye the Lord of the Harvest in order that

I will be able to thrust out laborers". Well, He is sovereign; can't He do anything He wants to do? Yes He can. But when He has chosen to limit His sovereignty you have no right to deprive Him of that sovereign right, and when God has said 'I am going to do it thus and not thus' He is acting completely within His sovereignty to say I'll do it that way. And you know a lot of people believe so in the sovereignty of God that they want to deprive Him of the right to be sovereign. They want to make Him fit their concept of sovereignty. But when God says I am going to do it on this pattern and not on that, He is acting within His prerogative. So, apparently there was some relationship that God sustained to men and Satan sustained to man, that made it imperative for the Lord Jesus to say to His own, you pray – "Pray You the Lord of the harvest in order that I'll be able to thrust out laborers into the harvest" (Mat. 9:38). Then I began to think. For the first time in my life I began to think. Up until that time I hadn't been thinking, I just had been assimilating, sort of like a photographic plate, if they held it there long enough, something would stick. But I wasn't thinking, and I didn't know what thinking was. We weren't taught to think, we were taught to remember. I am of the opinion that if many students had a built-in tape recorder that would play back at will, that they wouldn't need to have a brain at all, if they could just answer what the teachers said, they would get a Doctors' degree for it. But the question was, in my case at least, I had never been taught to think, but now I did. You know what thinking is? It is the process of asking and answering questions.

The quest is like stairs. You have got to have a runner, you don't just have boards scattered through air. There's got to be stringers as they are called in the trade, and this is the Word of God on the one side and the Holy Spirit on the other, and then there are the risers and the tread. And the question is the riser and the tread the answer. And so to think is to ask and answer the questions. And the first time in my life I began to think. The questions went like this: Why are these people in Africa in such a way, such a state of relationship, that it is necessary for the Lord to say to you, 'You pray so that I can send out laborers.' And then I began to go back to what I knew about the people in Africa. I knew they knew the name of God; they knew that God made the world; they knew that God was holy; they knew they were sinners; they knew God was angry with them; they knew they were going to go to Hell when they died, but there was no fear of God before their eyes. But their hearts were filled with fear. If they didn't fear God, who was it they did fear. The answer is simple, Satan. And then I remembered seeing the witch doctor carve the tribal marks into the little child's face, branding the child, marking him out as the possession of Satan. How did it come that Satan had the right to carve his brand into the face of a being made originally in the image and likeness of God. Where did it come that Satan obtained such right that he could do it and God wouldn't stop it. Well, then you have to go back to the Word and you come back to the fact that God made man. Ah! that's your next question. Who made man? Well, there was no hesitation on my part - God made man. Then my next question was more difficult - why did God make man? Did God make man to become the chattel of Satan? Did God make man to become the beast of burden; did He make him to become to fill Hell along with the damned demons, that is fallen evil spirits? Oh no!, no. Well, why did God make man? I read the Commentators, I read theological books, by commentators, and I didn't find a satisfactory answer. So I said, well, if the answer isn't obvious, then it must lie somewhere in the character of God. What is God that would want to have a being made in His image, His likeness? And then to that verse, "God is love". We know that the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit with all its other attributes is love; and love gives. He loved the world and gave His Son, the Son loved the world and gave His life, and love loves to give, and God from eternity past has been love as Father as Son as Holy Spirit He had been love, and then you discover from eternity past God had purposed to have a being made in His image, made in His likeness, a being like unto Himself. Someone like God. Why? So that God could love him. And why did he have to be like God? Why was it necessary for man to be made in the image of God? Why, because we can only love that which is like us. You can't love - oh we use the word lightly, you love the piano, the new car, fried chicken, a shade of blue. We use the word lightly and loosely and in a mistaken context. Essentially, you can only love that which is like yourself.

And if your love does turn away on an inanimate object it becomes unadulterated idolatry. It's just a prostitution. There are only two proper directions for love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God", because we are made in His image and likeness, and "love thy neighbor" because they are like us. We can only love that therefore which is like us. So it was necessary therefore for God to make a creature like Himself if He was to have an object for His love. Therefore the Father, desiring children, made a being in His likeness. The Son desiring brethren, a Bride made a being of whom it could be said "in His image and in His likeness". Well, that seemed to make sense, that God made man to meet the need of His heart for a beloved. Not in any sense that God was incomplete, but it was His sovereign purpose so to do from before the foundation of the world.

But then the question came right hard upon that. All right; it's good for God to make a creature like Himself; it's good for God to make someone that He can love, to whom he can reveal Himself, with whom He can share all that He is. But why did God make man so that he can sin. With all this trouble in the world; multitudes of people held in darkness all because of sin. What if God had just made man so that he couldn't sin? Do you know the next question that arises out of that, don't you. What is sin? Why did He make man so that he could sin - well what is sin? I'm trying to get you to think. Because during these mornings together it is imperative that you think with me, because I believe that the result of it is going to be of great spiritual profit in your own personal life.

Why, what is sin? Oh, you say, sin is lying, stealing, adultery, and murder. But these are actions of the body, of the glands, of the faculties. Are these things wrong? Didn't God give man a tongue; is speaking wrong? Is eating wrong? No. Are these essentially wrong; is it wrong to lift the fist; no, God made the fist to be lifted, the hand to work. But what is wrong. Well you see, God gave us urges that drive our appetites, and He gave with those urges every legitimate proper means, every necessary means to completely satisfy them. But, there came another individual on the scene who presented a proposition. The proposition was to gratify a legal appetite in a forbidden or an illegal way. And there you have your definition of temptation. Well, we had Satan come on the scene. Sin was the decision of the will, the committal of the will to the policy of self-pleasing; gratifying oneself, without regard to the will of God, without regards of the rights of others.

But the next question that rises out of this, is, Why did God make Satan? If Satan was the originating cause as far as man was concerned of sin, why did he make Satan? Then the answer has to come back that God didn't make Satan. God created Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, the most brilliant, the most beautiful, and the most intelligent creature that He'd made. Apparently He gave to Lucifer the faculties, abilities and scope of power far beyond anything He had ever given to man. Apparently He intended Lucifer to serve as something as a Prime Minister over the other angelic beings. Along with these other faculties, He gave to Lucifer the ability to think. Now, to think is a dangerous thing, and that's why the worst slavery in the world is the policing of the intellect, the policing of thought, and of course it's a bondage far worse than any chains that ever hang around the body and gall the flesh. It's the policing of your thinking.

But why did He make Satan so that he could think. Well if He hadn't, he'd have been merely an automaton, a machine. In order that Lucifer could function and serve as the Prime Minister over the other angelic beings, God gave him the ability to think or to imagine. To imagine is to conceive of that which is not as though it were, and then to take the proper steps to bring it into being.

Just this Thursday I drove down the east side of the Henry Hudson Highway and saw again the George Washington Bridge from that most spectacular of all views, and again I was overwhelmed with the scope of imagination, and man who stood there on the bank and looked up into the void across that chasm and over that river and saw that bridge before it was ever there. It's a delight to see it now. If you have any ability to enter into the poetry, the symmetry, the design in that structure, but just think of the mind of that man who just stood on the bank, and when everyone around him was in chorus saying "it can't be done, it can't be done" he looked out there and saw those piers and the great spanning of that river. What a mind! What a brain! What an intellect to imagine such a thing! Well, there's imagination, and he then took proper steps to bring what he saw to pass.

Here is Lucifer, Prime Minister over the angelic beings, and he being able to think 'It's good to be me, I have privileges and responsibilities, and I serve God' Then, 'If I were God I wouldn't do things the way He does. If I were God I'd do it this way and this way.' No sin yet. He's on dangerous ground. The ground is quivering under his feet, so to speak, and then he says 'if I were God --' and then there came that moment when sin became a reality, it had always potentially existed but it waited until an intelligent creature set his will against the will of God. When Satan said, "I will be like the most High. I'll set my throne above His throne" (Isa. 14:13). Then the plotting, then the planning, then the sedition, the undermining of government, until at length he got the company of angelic beings to unite with him to make war on God, and Satan, being an intelligent creature, realized that if he was to make war on God, he'd have to have weapons, and he also realized that ultimate defense and ultimate strength is in character - in what you are, not in what you have.

You think your security rests in your bank account? Look out! Inflation may come tomorrow and you won't have it. You think it rests in your talents? Look out! Those things are just play and paint and that brain to think is in there within a hair's breadth of being destroyed. No, your security isn't in what you have, it's in your character - in what you are. The French thought their security was in the Maginot Line. The only trouble was that they fixed the guns, so that when the emergency arose they were pointed in the wrong direction. Because the Germans went up and came down into Belgium and there the Maginot Line guns were useless.

And may I just leave a word of warning here. We think that our security is in the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb. No, no, no, because it is quite possible for someone to come under the guise of patriotism and put their finger on the trigger of our own atom bomb. There is only one security - it's in the character of the people. Unfortunately, our character is deteriorating at such a rapid rate, that there is very little source of security or comfort to us even there. But Satan said I'm going to be like God, I'm going to destroy God, and I'll put my throne above the throne of God. He was a live individual. We've seen that through the years, terms of certain natural wisdom, and he knew that if he could defeat God he'd have to have weapons that were capable of it. And he knew that God strength-wise and what God is.

What does the Bible tell us that God is? Well, our Lord Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". We have two things there: God is Truth and God is Life. And then we know God is Love and God is Light. So we can take four things that we see that God is. There are many others that we can add to it. All the attributes of God could be included. But God is Love, God is Light, God is Life, God is Truth.

Now Satan is wise enough to know that he couldn't defeat God and say I'll out-love Him to get my throne above His throne. Satan knew something that you knew and know and that is that every thesis has its antithesis; every front has its back; every positive has to have a negative in order to be anything as a positive. And he knew that the opposite of love was hate, and so you can see him, if you please, reaching out and taking as part of his character - Hate. And then he sees that God is Light and he takes darkness; God is Life so he secures death; God is Truth so he takes the lie. And here's a battle - a battle of character of two beings - one that is saying I can overthrow God because I take the very opposite as my weapon, and God can never reach down and take the same weapon I'm using or else he is going to have to destroy Himself. Love is going to have to vanquish hate; light is going to have to swallow up darkness; life is going to have to defeat death and truth is going to have to overcome the lie. There is a battle in heaven. You say, why didn't God say, 'I hate this man, I'm going to destroy him'. If He had done it in hate, He'd have destroyed Himself. But ultimately Satan had to admit to a measure of defeat; he was cast out of heaven and on earth. In the fullness of time God recreated the world, we find it in Genesis, and He prepared it as the bower where He was going to put His beloved. He made as the place to which He'd bring this one that He was making in His image and likeness. He provided everything necessary. There is only one thing He didn't do. He didn't put a big fence up and say, 'now Satan you stay over there, my beloved is here and I don't want you to ever talk to him'. He didn't do that. He let Him come. You say, well why didn't God put a fence and say, 'Satan, you stay up there, I have my beloved here'. Listen, if He had done that He wouldn't have had Love. He'd have had merely the love of ignorance. And so God permitted Satan to come. He was there, He was there! He could have stepped out when Satan appeared in his beguiling form and said, 'Eve, don't listen to him'. He let Satan have the floor, He let him have the center of the stage, and He let him present his proposition. He'd already manifested his character to her; he'd revealed himself to her; the sanctions were known to her, and you can hear Satan and Eve as this dialogue goes on, and the Lord Jesus standing there listening to it all. "Yea, hath God?" "You won't die, you'll be like God", and he sees what's going on in her heart. But He made her. He had to give to her the ability to say no to him if her yes was to have any meaning. If he had made Eve so that she'd have to say yes, Eve would have been a mere moral automaton, no value to it. She had to be able to say "no" to God so that when she said "yes" the yes would have meaning. And there you see Satan lie and misrepresent God in appeal to her appetite, and Eve's heart begins to curdle and boil and at length she says "I will, I'll be like God, I'll put my throne above the throne of God, I'll be God in my own life; I'll join you in your rebellion, and then to Adam; and then down across the centuries and God sits, as it were, watching the passing parade of generations and He is looking into every heart, and at length He says this, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it" "I, the Lord, that search the heart" (Jer. 17:9-10). The sentence for rebellion, for treason, for enmity was death. All that ever breathed the breath of human life were sentenced to die. Die they must for God is truth. Oh, if there were somehow, some way there could

come one like man that could die. The law must be carried out “the soul that sinneth must die” (Eze. 18:20). This means the extinction of the human race, not a one that’s right for God. But in the fullness of time, God, who made man in His image, now is made in the image of man; takes upon Himself the image of man; takes upon Himself our form and likeness, clothed Himself with human flesh and is born of a Virgin. Then He submits to every temptation that Satan could bring, every pressure that life could bring; He knew poverty; He knew need, He knew hunger; He knew work. He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. And of Him the Father said, at the age of 30, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17). Then for three years his ministry is to reveal the Father, to answer the calumnies, the lies, the misrepresentation that Satan had been purveying during all these centuries; that God is grace, and love and mercy, and kindness rather than the brutal sovereign that had brought all these miseries upon men. And you see it in the case as this woman comes all twisted in arthritis, and the people say in their mistaken theology “God did that” and the Lord Jesus said “ought not this daughter of Abraham, bound lo these 18 years by Satan, ought not she be loosed?” He’s revealing the nature of God, the love, the mercy, the compassion of God. Then, for He is God came in the flesh. Then at length to Calvary! First to the Garden. There in Gethsemane’s garden He has man’s sin imputed to Him and man’s uncleanness reckoned to Him, and the Lord Jesus is led forth, and then to Calvary, suspended between Heaven and Earth. And what happens now? The ancient conflict, the conflict that began back before time began, when Satan had come against God; and he doesn’t know what happened; he doesn’t realize what is taking place, for had he known it he never would have done it. But at last he says ‘God is vulnerable’, because when He took your sin He was subject to death, and that the death of the Cross. But there the Lord Jesus comes now, for He is going to vanquish His enemy in open conflict. And Love hangs on the cross and stares into those cruel eyes of hatred and says, ‘Hatred do your worst’ and Light says to Darkness “this is your hour”, and Life says to Death, “Death do all you can” and Truth says to the Lie, “now is your time” and He hangs there suspended between Heaven and Earth. The Father sees Him as you, and brings the cup of His wrath against sin to His Son to be drunk by His Son for you. But there is something else happening there. Satan sees Him as God, and in Psalms 22, Psalms 38 and in Isaiah you have the picture of the bulls of Bashan and the ox and the dogs, all of the beings of the Pit, Satan the Lie himself and all of the hordes that come up in the clouds of darkness that obscures the sun at midday, and at length, when there is not another spear in the hands of any of the hosts of Hell, and not another arrow in the quiver of Satan, and not another bull can fall upon the Son of God; when Hatred and Darkness and Death and the Lie have exhausted themselves pummeling the Son of God, the Lord Jesus looks up with exultant joy and cries “It is finished” (Joh. 19:30). What does He mean - it is finished? It means that the penalty of sin is fully paid and that the power of Hell, the power of Satan is fully broken, and He gives up the ghost; laid cold in death in the tomb, with grave clothes, which is but a picture of the shackles that death has forged to block the route, but the third day, that God precisely on time, returns again to that broken body, and all of the evidences of brutality are gone save those five wounds He chooses to preserve. He breaks the bonds, He bursts the chains, and He stands forth in the glory of His resurrection triumph. Today there’s a man in the glory, Christ Jesus whose presence there testifies that the penalty of Sin is fully paid. The power of Sin is finally broken, and the power of Hell has been snapped forever. He led captivity captive and came forth in the glory of His resurrection triumph. This is the Victory of Christ.

Let us pray.

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