

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Taught by Bruce Bickel
“Ministry Without Masks”
Session: August 23, 20013

Gracious and heavenly Father, we pray that You would be pleased to cleanse us of all of our unrighteousness and make us worthy vessels to sit at Your feet and that Your Holy Spirit would be our teacher. You are a God of compassion and mercy and Your compassion is beyond our comprehension, but our need for it is beyond our description. We trust that we experience Your mercy for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We concluded last week a question and answer period on our interlude and discussion on Union **With** Christ, and what does it mean to be **in** Christ; what does it mean to have Christ **in** us; what does it mean to be **like** Christ; and what does it mean to be **with** Christ. That was our study on the Union With Christ topic. We had some questions and answers that I trust were very helpful in our asking ourselves, “What am I going to do about what I just learned?”

Today I want to return to our original theme, which is Triumphant Living, and we find that in our passage. Please turn in your Bibles to 2nd Corinthians 2:12. I'm going to read Chapter 2:12 all the way down to Chapter 3:16, which is what we look at today. And to do that, this is a large portion of Scripture, and I am going to ask that you stand to show due reverence and respect for the reading of God's Word. This is the Word of the Lord. “Thanks be to God.”

From 2nd Corinthians Chapter 2, beginning at verse 12. “Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And Who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.”

2nd Corinthians 3:1-16. “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant

the same veil remains un-lifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

Amen and Amen. Please be seated.

Now that was the passage that launched our study into a study that we are calling “Triumphant Living.” You will notice that phrase as found in 2nd Corinthians 2:14, where I began when Paul says, “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession...” Two questions I want to ask you, to get us started, and a little bit of review to help us understand why we are going back into this theme of Triumphant Living. Have you ever had your plans change? I mean something that you really wanted to do and your heart was set on it, and it is out of your control, something happened that you could not make it happen, you could not stop it, it just... everything changed. Have you ever had your plans changed?

Now mine were changed dramatically years ago during Viet Nam; one day when I was shot down, I could not fly after that. My whole life prior to that was oriented towards becoming an admiral, making a career in the Navy and being an aviator. All of a sudden...I had nothing to do with that per se, other than perhaps I flew in the wrong area. {LAUGHTER} But something was taken away.

Now that is what Paul is saying right here. He’s saying, “When I came to Troas, there was an opportunity for me to preach the gospel.” But his plans changed. His plan was to go preach the gospel but he said, “I did not see my brother Titus there and so I did not have a clear conscience or good spirit about that, so I left.” Now when we would look at this from a human point of view, here is an evangelist who goes into an area, the City of Troas, and he says, “There is a wonderful door for ministry. And I left.” Now we would say that was a failure, but what does Paul say? He says, “But thanks be to God who always leads in triumphal procession.” You see, his plans were dramatically changed, but the way he looked at it was this: it is really God who is in control of my life and my ministry, not me. This may have been what I wanted to do, but the reason he decided to leave is that there is a bigger issue than his own personal ministry. And that was the well-being of the churches in Asia Minor and he needed a report back from Titus to tell him what was going on. So he submitted to something that was bigger than himself.

It was something that the Lord was doing, not something that he wanted to do. Right in the midst of his having his plans changed, his response is not, “Oh rats, I didn’t get to do what I wanted to do.” His response is this: “But thanks be to God who always leads in triumph...” Now the sense of that in the original text is this: “But thanks be to God who always, always, always leads in triumph.” See, you and I have to realize that God’s triumphs do not necessarily look like ours. When God Who is the Lord of our lives changes our plan, what is our response? Is it, “Oh, I didn’t get to do what I wanted to do, my heart was set on this.” Or is it this: “Thanks be to God.” How do you have a response like that? That is not a natural human response. As we see in Paul’s life as we go through the rest of this, you will see that his response is a function of the covenant of grace.

It is all about grace and the reason Paul can say, “Thanks be to God,” as we will study in the next several months, is his understanding of what grace is. He’s saying, “I understand that God has had an arrangement with His people from Genesis to Revelation, all of His people in both the Old Testament and New Testament [UNCLEAR] is founded on one thing: the Covenant of Grace. Remember this: grace is God’s Resources At Christ’s Expense. The reason he can say that, “But thanks be to God who leads us in triumph...” is because he understands the arrangement that God has with him through the Covenant of Grace.

The word “covenant” means arrangement. God has always had one arrangement with all of His people. It is the arrangement of grace and it has two different demonstrations; there is the Old Covenant, one picture; and then you have another picture, the New Covenant. But it is the same thing. The Old Testament saints were saved the same way the New Testament saints were. That is through the personal work of Christ, trusting Him. So everything is all about grace and that is what Paul is talking about.

The reason I have selected this passage for us to study and to look at triumphant living is because it is a clear demonstration of Paul’s description of how do you live in the Covenant of Grace? How do I really respond? His first response when his life changed dramatically was this, “But thanks be to God who always leads in triumph.” Now guys, that is not natural. That is a function of grace. We are going to understand why Paul now tells us why he can do that. He is describing this: If somebody said to you, “I would like to come and know why you are a Christian,” how would you answer that? Would you say, “Well, I have memorized so many passages of Scripture, or I tithe, or I have been a member of my church for x-number of years,” or whatever you might say. But you know what Paul says? When somebody says, “Paul, how do we know that you are authentic?” Because there were some people his age who are saying, “Paul is not a legitimate apostle because he was not there like the other 11; so how can we trust him, how can we trust a man who years ago was a persecutor of the church and now you are telling me he is the primary preacher for the church? There is a disconnect there, how did that happen? So Paul what happened to you and why should we pay attention to you, why should we give you our ears and listen to you? We don’t even think you are authentic. How would you describe yourself?”

So if somebody said to you today, describe yourself as an authentic believer; how would you do that, what would you say? Here is what Paul does, he says, “Just take a look at my life, observe my life and then you will know whether or not I am authentic.” That is what we are going to study because if Paul’s whole response started with this significant change in his life’s desire, and that was to preach at Troas, and all of a sudden something radically changed and Paul says, “But thanks be to God...” That is because he understood this: he was involved in an arrangement through God the Father, through God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit... known as the Covenant of Grace. So Paul says, “Just come along and take a look at my life.”

Now in my judgment...several years ago when I was leaving the Fellowship of Christian Athletes there was a church who was calling me to be a candidate to be their senior pastor, and they said, “Would you answer these questions?” And I said, “No, why don’t you come and live with me for a week and find out what kind of a man I am. Look at how I respond to my neighbors. You need to come and observe me.” All I was doing was just trying to play off of what Paul was doing. So they sent someone who came to live with me for a week. And they didn’t invite me. {MUCH LAUGHTER} Then they said, “You know that was really good, we got to see how you function.” That is what Paul said, “Just take a look at my life, I’m not going to answer questions, I’m not going to fill out a dossier and answer these ten questions on my theological position. You need to come and observe my life, see how I get along with my neighbors, how do I treat my family, how do I respond to authority, what are my disciplines of my personal life? You need to see that before you understand if I am going to come and be your pastor. So after living with me for five days and see how I raise my dog and how well trained he was {LAUGHTER}...very obedient: “Dirk sit, Dirk down, Dirk stay, Dirk come.” I said “Your people are just like that and that is what I’m going to have your church do.” {LAUGHTER} They said, “We’ll see you later.” {LAUGHTER} Do you understand the point?

Often times we just think that we can just answer questions and describe who we are, but Paul teaches us something different. He said, “Examine my life.” That is what we are going to do. That is why we are calling this study “Triumphant Living” because Paul is going to describe for us the ingredients of being an authentic believer by having people observe your life because you understand that you are in the arrangement known as grace.

God has only had one arrangement with all of His people and that is known as grace. There have been two demonstrations or two manifestations of it: one is known as the Old Covenant and that refers back to Mount Sinai at the giving of the law and the ten commandments, which introduced the arrangement of obedience. The common characteristic of both the Old and the New Covenant is that we refer to the New Covenant because that is the word that Jesus used. When He instituted the Lord’s Supper He said, “This is the new covenant in my blood.” Now why do we call it the New Covenant? Because Jesus called it the New Covenant. If that is what He called it, that is what we need to call it. It is not anything new or different, it is just a different manifestation. The Old Covenant referred back to Mount Sinai, the institution of the law through the ten commandments and, therefore, obedience was the key because the Old Covenant was this: If you will obey, I will be your God. Obedience was the key. But the obedience was something that they had to achieve in order to receive.

The New Covenant is this: It does not depend upon my obedience, it depends upon Christ’s obedience. That is the difference and that is why Jesus said, “This is the blood of the New Covenant. Do this in remembrance of Me.” You see He is calling attention to His obedience, not the obedience of the Old Covenant. So obedience is the key in both of them.

But in the old arrangement through the law, obedience was depended upon **me**; in the New Covenant because of the shed blood of Christ, you are wrapped in the robes of righteousness and washed in the Blood of the Lamb. Obedience is the key, but it is **His** obedience. So whose obedience are you trusting? In the old arrangement of grace, known as the Old Covenant, it was **my** obedience. In the New Covenant, which Jesus refers to as His covenant, it is **His** obedience.

Either way, the obedience is there; in the Old Covenant it is **my** obedience and in the New Covenant it is **His** obedience.

Yes, John.

JOHN: *Do I need to stand up? OK, a couple of questions I have for you. In the Old Testament in Psalm 32 David says, “Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sin are covered; blessed is the one to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” OK? So you are saying it was power of obedience in the Old Testament before wrapped in the robes of Christ’s righteousness...but didn’t David kind of say that....*

If they were saved the same way in the Old Covenant as they were the New...all I’m trying to say is that there was a difference in the Old Covenant to point out their inability to be obedient. Their inability to be obedient and, therefore, they needed a Savior.

JOHN: *OK, but they still had the principle though of the imputation of God’s righteousness like you did in Genesis [UNCLEAR] and that leads to my second question. Doesn’t the Old Covenant really begin in Eden and not Mount Sinai?*

The Old Covenant started in the Garden. The first demonstration of God's grace is when He made the clothing for Adam and Eve. That is the beginning of grace.

JOHN: *Exactly, that is the promise of the gospel in Genesis 3.*

Everything else is a function of grace from thereon out. See, the introduction of grace is in the Garden. Now there are different demonstrations in God's providence to help us understand the need for a personal Savior is, and in the old arrangement it exposed the fallacy of my inability to be obedient. In the New Covenant you see that Christ was the means of our obedience. So either way, it is all the same thing. It is all one covenant of grace, it just had different demonstrations in God's providence of how He is pointing to the personal work of Christ. Everything points to the personal work of Christ. The Old Testament saints were saved exactly the same way the New Testament saints were and that is because of the Blood of Christ; the imputed righteousness of Christ was given to them when they recognized my in-obedience cannot achieve it and I need to receive it through the personal work of Christ. They looked towards Him, we look backwards and see Him. So either way, it is all about grace. Do you understand that? That is what I'm trying to say. All I'm trying to say is this: when Jesus said it was the New Covenant, He is not saying that it is anything different, He is just saying, that the emphasis now is on Me and not on you. It has always been on Him, but the Old Covenant was designed to show you that it cannot be about you and that it has to be about Him; therefore, you will fail.

In the New Covenant He says, "This is the New Covenant in My Blood which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me." So the whole thing is about grace. Do you understand that? You're sure? Any other questions? It is all about grace. That is what we're talking about. That is the whole point of why we selected this passage to talk about triumphant living.

When I talk about triumphant living and I say, "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession" I am not saying the next time you are driving down the interstate and you have a flat tire that you get up and say, "Oh, thank you Jesus." I am not saying that type of phony thanksgiving but I am talking about a deep-seeded, routed confidence in the personal work of Christ. That is what we're talking about. It is not something that is phony and external, it is something that is deeply routed.

Yes, Don.

DON: *Ya, I was going to bring that up also...in verse 13...and momentarily Paul was troubled and said, "I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find Titus..." but in the next verse he responded "But thanks be to God..." So thank you for brining that up.*

Yes that is the point. This is not something that is phony. It is something that is deep-seated and routed in the confidence of the grace of God, because remember this: it is God's resources at Christ's expense. God's resources at Christ's expense.

Now we come to a passage today, beginning at verses 12-16 of 2nd Corinthians 3, where we talk about ministry without masks. Based upon that little introduction about God's grace, how is it that we give away what God has given us? That is what ministry is. We have defined ministry as giving away to someone else what God has given us. That is ministry. Now Paul talks about giving that away. Unless you know what God has given you,

there is nothing that we have to give away. You might just have a nice program but it is not going to have any eternal consequences. Ministry is giving away to someone else what God has given you.

Notice what he says here in 2nd Corinthians 3:12. “Therefore having such a hope...” Where is his hope? There are two elements of our ministry without masks, and the reason I’m calling this “Ministry Without Masks” is because there is a contrast between Moses wearing the veil when he came down off the mountain to hide the glory that was fading. That is where we get the idea of wearing masks. Often times you and I wear masks just like Moses did. He wore the mask to hide the fact that the glory that was on his face, because he had been in the presence of the Lord, was now fading and he wanted to cover that up. You and I cover up a lot of things in our lives.

There are two things we cover up, first of all in our speech and secondly in our openness. So we want to take a look at what we have about ministry without masks. We have to understand that in verse 12 where this ministry without masks in our boldness of speech comes from.

Verse 12. “Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech,” Now where does the hope come from? It comes from the verses right before that which have to do with the glory of the gospel. Our hope is in the glory of the gospel and it is found in a person. It is not found in my ability to be able to answer people’s questions. Our hope is in the glory of understanding the gospel.

Notice the contrast here, verse 10. “For indeed what had glory, in this case had no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.” There is a suggestion in there...he is talking about the Old vs. the New and the gospel is what gives us our hope. So our hope is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ, Who is the subject of the gospel. So when you are talking about the gospel, you are talking about a person and you are not talking about a program. You are introducing a person to another person and that is the Person of Jesus Christ. That is where our hope comes from.

We need to understand that the first manifestation of that is boldness—how we speak. The word “boldness” here is a very interesting word, and it means the absence of fear in speaking. The absence of fear in speaking. How many times have you when somebody says, “How did you become a Christian, or why are you a Christian, or what is this Christian faith, or what are you doing at your church?” How often have you had this little twinge of fear at that moment? What goes through your mind? Let’s be honest. Someone says, “Tell me why you are a follower of Christ?” What goes through your mind? Be honest.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *They will think poorly of me.*

They will think poorly of me. That might be one...that is a legitimate fear that we might have. Paul says because of our hope in the gospel and the person of Christ, that we have a boldness, we have the ability to speak without fear. What is another reason that you might have this mask and put on the mask because you might hold back on what you say? Now I’m not suggesting...understand what I am not saying. Paul is not suggesting that you and I are Bible bashers. I am not saying that at all. All I’m saying is that Paul is saying this: when you understand the arrangement of grace that God has with you, and you understand the personal work of Christ through the gospel, you have the ability because of Christ, Who always leads in triumph, to speak boldly and clearly without fear.

Yes, please.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *[UNCLEAR]...for doing [UNCLEAR] possible [UNCLEAR].*

Sure, another fear might be “I might not do it well.” Another one might be “I might not be well thought of.”

Yes, another one, yes sir.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Fear of being offensive, about not being politically correct.*

There you go. Fear of being offensive to somebody. Isn't it ironic that in our world today and the system of the world, always has the Christians lower their standard so that we do not offend other people? Now, they are offended when we do something to them, but they do not worry about offending us, do they? That is just the system of the world. Paul says, “...in the midst of that you have to realize this: that God always leads in triumph.” So you and I have this, because of our hope in the person of Christ and in the arrangement of grace, we have the ability to speak boldly. That does not mean that you do it blindly and Bible bash people. It just means that when you have the ability to speak and answer someone's questions about your personal faith, you can do that without fear. That is the issue...without fear. You don't have to worry about that. I find it ironic the number of times...I just had a friend call me yesterday who was relieved from his position at work because his boss said something like, “You cannot have devotions here and mention Jesus, you cannot pray with our people and mention Christ; you can do a bunch of other things but you cannot do anything that brings the person of Christ into our environment. Because that might offend people.” Here is a young man who is being removed from his position because in the naturalness of his own life, he works in a retirement center, and somebody is on their death bed says, “Will you pray with me?” and he prays with him in the name of Jesus Christ. And his boss is saying, “You can pray, but you can't mention Jesus.” You see, what Paul is teaching us, “But thanks be to God who always leads in triumph...” In the midst of all this, God will use this as a triumph. You and I just need to realize that we can speak boldly, and that means that we can speak clearly about the truth and we can do it without fear because of what? Because we are trusting what Christ will do with that; that is the hope that he is talking about.

Notice what he says, “Therefore, having such a hope...” Our hope is what Christ will accomplish through our speaking boldly without fear. That does not mean that you go and quote all sorts of Scripture with him. I don't know what it means because I don't know what the Holy Spirit will be doing in you at the time, but we just need to be an aggressive responder to what the Lord is doing and you can speak without fear. Often times, we wear a mask because we are so concerned about what other people will think. Now rightfully so, that does not mean that we have a license to just be flippant in what we say. We need to speak grace and truth. Truth is always kept covered by grace. We need to speak the truth graciously, but we can do it boldly. We can do that because God always leads in triumph, we can do that because of the hope that we have in us. So, sometimes you and I wear this mask, just like Moses did, put it on because we are concerned about the response.

Yes, Tom.

TOM: *I think a lot of this goes right back to what you have been saying about being **in** Christ; we wear a mask because we want people to see what we want them to think of us, rather than us ourselves. If they saw us, they would actually see Christ.*

Amen, good thought. You see it all comes back to our understanding of what it means to be **in** Christ.

Let me just show you an extreme contrast. I just did a message in a church recently on the difference between church expansion and church growth. During some of my research, I came across some literature from some of the premier church growth advocates. Now of course they define church growth as numerical. I define church growth as depth. When you look at Acts 2:41, three thousand were added and that is expansion. The next day, they gave themselves to the apostles' doctrine and that is growth. There is a difference between expansion and growth. Church growth advocates now isolated and have gone to modernism and they have taken all of the extreme and saying, "Church growth is now defined numerically." We discussed that a couple of weeks ago. But here is one of the pieces of literature that came out of the most well known church advocate and proponent. He says this: "The congregation is sovereign..."

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS: *Whew, wow, what congregation has he been... [UNCLEAR]?*

America...the American church. He is teaching preachers now...he teaches preaching in church growth and he says, "The congregation is sovereign and it is the preacher's responsibility to make his communications achieve what he wants to get." In other words, you orient your speech so that you will achieve the outcome that you want to get...which is, because you are now looking at the needs of the congregation...they are sovereign... figure out what they want and you make sure that you make a way to communicating that so that you will get the response that you want. That is coming out of church growth experts. They are saying this is how you build the church. You take the presumption and take the presupposition that the congregation is sovereign and they determine what you say. You figure out how to say it so that you will get what you want, the response from the congregation is sovereign. That is church growth?

Yes, Dale.

DALE: *Here is a prayer for that kind of a church growth: "Give me this, give me that, bless me Lord I pray; grant me what I think I need to get me through the day." {LAUGHTER and CLAPPING}*

Now notice, that is wearing a mask. That is putting a mask on because what are you trying to do? I want to get the response from the audience. What Paul is saying is, "No, because of the hope that is in you, you know this: God always leads in triumph and you now can pull that mask off and you can speak boldly." That means you can speak without fear; it does not mean that you are going to do everything perfectly right. That is not what he is saying. Certainly, we can improve on the way that we communicate the gospel of Christ, but what he is saying is this: "When you have the opportunity, you do not need to put the mask on and hide behind it. You can be open because you are **in** Christ and you know this: the reason that you can do that boldly is because you are trusting the fact that Christ, who always leads in triumph, is going to do something by your boldness. And so you can have the honesty to do that. Let me give you a very crass illustration. When I was pulled off the ship and was going into Viet Nam to be with the army...my second tour I was a foreign air controller and I was sent in country to be with the 101st Airborne Division, First Calvary Division and spent six months with each of those excellent army units. My job was to coordinate naval air strikes from carrier-based aircraft in support of the infantry, and they needed a navy pilot to go inside who knew the aircraft capabilities and limitations of naval aircraft to support the army. At one time in my career I found myself as the only naval officer among 20,000 army guys I thought the ratio was about even. {LAUGHTER}

But anyway, on my flight over on a chartered flight and after I got out of survivor school, we left San Diego. I'm sitting beside this guy who is a commander in the navy. Now here is my thought process: When do I give him the four spiritual laws? Do I do it before the chicken is served? Or do I do it after his coffee? I know this,

I've got to do this. Because that is what we do...isn't it? I'm sitting beside somebody...I've got to give him the four spiritual laws? So I'm thinking...beads of sweat come down...when do I do it? I know I've got to do it because it depends upon me. It is all about me, because I want him to come to Christ; I want that response so I've got to do this right. So, do I do it before or after dinner? So, after the dessert was served, "Commander, do you know that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?" And he turns around and says, "Don't hand me that crap." {LAUGHTER} I knew I should have done it before dessert! {LAUGHTER}

Now that to me was just a horrible experience because I looked at it all as depending on me. When do I do this? When do I get the result that I want? I'm instructed that this is what I am supposed to do. So nothing happened. It was a terrible flight. About seven months later, I'm on an R&R flight from Saigon down to Sidney, Australia and I am just wiped out. I had [UNCLEAR] dysentery and I had lost weight and was down to about 145 lbs.—just really wiped out from all the flying I was doing. I'm sitting down by the window and guess who sits beside me? The same guy, the same commander from the navy who I had said...I blew it because I didn't do it before dessert. He sits down beside me and I'm thinking--now, here is my attitude this time,—"Lord I'm just really tired and I am just going to trust that You are going to lead in triumph while I sleep. That's all I can do right now, I just don't have anything else to do, I can't do anything, I'm just worn out and I need the rest. So, Lord, I'm just going to give you my sleep and I'm going to trust you with my sleep. I'm just going to trust that You will lead in triumph." Because I was just studying this in my own devotions while I was in Viet Nam. "I'm going to trust that You lead in triumph all the time, so will you triumph even while I'm asleep?" I had one of the best sleeps I have ever had. About halfway through the flight, he elbows me and he said, "Hey, I see you've been sleeping there." And I said, "Yes, sir." We talked a little bit and had some conversation about what we do; he did not remember me, of which I am so grateful. {LAUGHTER}

He said, "You know, I've just been thinking about something. Could I ask you a question?" I answered, "Certainly, sir, is it about what I do?" He said, "No, no, in the MAC-V compound in Saigon where I am, there is a Bible study going on and I go to that periodically. Do you know anything about what it means to be redeemed? What does redemption mean?" {LAUGHTER} Thanks be to God who always leads in triumph—even in my sleep—God is pleased to do something! Totally different, totally different. See, that is what Paul says, "When you realize it does not depend upon you...and our boldness comes because of the hope of the personal work of Christ who always leads in triumph...it is really all about Him. That does not mean that you sit back on your haunches and go to sleep, I'm not saying that. All I'm trying to do is draw the severe contrast between what I thought I needed to do because that is what I'm supposed to do, and it is up to me; and if I don't do it well, it is going to be a disaster, which it was. Or is this confidence you have in the personal work of Christ and the hope that is in you because of the gospel? But you know this: because of the covenant of grace, God is the One Who always, always, always leads in triumph. There is a radical difference between thinking that it is dependent upon my obedience vs. trusting His obedience and resting in that. That is the hope that Paul is talking about.

The word therefore... "Therefore, we have this hope in the personal work of Christ Who always leads in triumph." Do you see the contrast and the difference? That is when ministry comes; I had something to give away so we had a wonderful discussion on redemption...being rescued through the payment of a price. When we left, I gave him my Bible and I said, "Why don't you just take this with you...I've never seen him since then. But there was such a radical difference in my understanding of who I needed to be at that moment because prior to that, I always thought it was up to me. That is what I had always been told, "It's up to you." Now it is still up to us but it is up to us to do what? To walk by faith, to trust the personal work of Christ Who says this, "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession."

Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *You and Don were talking about obedience, it came to pass right there. Obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to lead you when, where, how, and with whom...and be prepared, but as you said, the first instance—I'm going to jump out here...like jumping out of an airplane; but the second time was you gave it over and when the timing was right according to the Holy Spirit, and when the question was asked...bingo...there it is...that term and action of obedience...*

Absolutely. That is being an aggressive responder. See, there is a huge difference in saying, I'm going to do something and then ask the Lord to bless it. You would be surprised the number of times that people come into my office because I deal with families who give grants from their foundations, who come and say, "I need to start a new ministry. The Lord is calling me to start a new ministry or a new program." I say, "Based upon what?" And they will answer, "I don't like my boss. I don't like my working environment. I'm not satisfied where I am, therefore, God is calling me to start a new ministry. Will you help me fund it?" What they are basically saying is this: "I'm going to go start something and ask God to bless it." I say, "Why don't you go back and be in the ministry where you are and see what the Lord does?" Go right back where you are and just do it. You want to disciple men, then do it. Ask the Lord to give you one person in your working environment and begin to disciple that person. Take him through the Scriptures and just see what happens. There is a difference in joining what God is doing because you know when you do that, it is already blessed; as opposed to my initiating something and asking God to bless it. There is a difference in being an aggressive responder.

What Paul is saying is this: "Because of our hope that we have in the gospel of grace and the personal work of Christ, when the opportunity comes for us to speak and to share and to talk about our faith, you can do it without fear." You can do it without fear because you know that God always, always, always leads in triumph. It doesn't mean that you are not prepared, it does not mean that you are sloppy, it doesn't mean that you are a Bible basher. But it does mean this: when the opportunity comes, you can be an aggressive responder and not worry about the response you are going to get when you speak with grace and truth. Remember this: it is the balance of grace and truth. Truth without grace is only a half truth. Grace without truth is no grace at all. It is grace and truth, you can do it with confidence and boldness because of the hope that we have in the person of Christ Who always, always, always leads in triumph.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your mercy; we thank You because of the hope that we have in the person of Christ; not in our product, not in our performance, but the hope that we have in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ that we understand what grace is, and that grace is God's Resources At Christ's Expense. Father, we just trust that when the opportunity comes, we will be aggressive responders to give away what You have given us; and that is You have given us hope in the gospel of the person of Christ. May we give that away for Your glory. And all of God's children said, "Amen."

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Can we take a moment a pray for Tom?*

Yes. Tom come on up. Tom Hansz will you join me? Give us a quick 30-second review of where you are headed and what you are doing. Just tell us what is coming up.

TOM: *I'll be headed back next week to Zagreb, Croatia, the capital, and continuing to work for the church plant there and, hopefully, will also be a Bible instructor at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in nearby in the City of Ulcia.*

I'm going to ask Tom Hansz to pray for you and let's just grab a hand of one of the Brothers near you and we will just join ourselves together for prayer as Tom for your Brother, sending him off to be God's rep for us.

TOM HANSZ: *Holy Father, we thank you that we have the confidence to know that it is You Who are in charge and not us. We pray that you will be with Tom and his ministry as they go back to Croatia and that You have prepared the way for him, that he might present Christ to others who have not seen Him and that he might help those who know Christ to mature, and that Your Word will prosper through the work that You have given to him to spread among those people. Please give them safe travel, give them blessings of Your grace and peace and the confidence to know that it is You Who are doing this work and Tom is so grateful to be a part of what you are doing; and that we can rejoice in the fact that You will prosper Your Word to grow because of Jesus Christ. Thank You, and watch over him. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.*