

TRIUMPHANT LIVING

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...but we come away with all the work in Christ Jesus. So we are not worthy to receive what you give us but you give us the work that we have in the personal work of Christ. Father, we pray that you would be pleased once again as we begin a new study on the implications of living a life in the covenant of grace, and how that really translates into our conduct, into our demonstration of our commitment to Christ and the magnificent power of the covenant of grace. So, Father we just pray that you would be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen!

Well we just finished several months, almost a year, studying The Sermon on the Mount where we saw the Christian manifesto. Where Jesus was pleased to teach his disciples and us about the great picture of what the Kingdom of God looks like. We discussed the characteristics of the Kingdom of God, we looked at the characteristics of a kingdom citizen, and we looked at the conduct of a kingdom citizen in the Kingdom of God.

So today we want to begin a new series and I'm just calling this Triumphant Living. It is going to be a study of our understanding of what it means to live in the covenant of grace. Now God has had one primary means by which he is drawing people back into a relationship with him. What we need more of in our Christian faith is we need more of God. We accept salvation as a gift but we don't realize that the primary object of salvation, its chief blessing, is to make us fit to bring us back into a saving relationship to a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ through God's arrangement known as grace.

We were created to be the means by which God would demonstrate his holiness, and we are the means by which we put his holiness on display. God has had one eternal arrangement to make that possible, and it's known as the eternal covenant of grace. The word covenant means arrangement and when you look throughout all of history, all of mankind, God has had one single arrangement by which he is drawing his people back into a relationship with himself in order for us to fulfill all the implications of what he designed us to be, and that is through this arrangement known as grace.

Now in the Scriptures we talk about two different kinds of covenants: the New Covenant and the Old Covenant. It's really one covenant and that is the eternal covenant of grace. You begin to see this introduced, the first glimpse of it, in the fall of man in the Book of Genesis when God takes the skins of animals and he covers up the sin of Adam and Eve. That's the first indication, the first little glimmer, of this covenant of grace. Because God did something for them that they could not do for themselves. You begin to see that he starts to provide a means for them to deal with their sin, that's the spirit behind this covenant of grace; it's an eternal covenant.

Now, there is only one covenant and it has two dispensations. Now I'm not a big fan of the word "dispensational" because there is a stream of theology that basically says that God works in different epochs or different ages, about six or seven different ages; and he works one way in this age, and another way in that age, and another way in another age. That is not the position I hold. So I do not

especially like the word dispensational. But there are two time frames in which we see this eternal covenant of grace manifested to mankind. So we need to understand this: there is one covenant and God always acts the same way throughout history. It's manifested and revealed differently, hence we call it the old and the new. As we go through this, we'll see that it is really one covenant with two different dispensations or two different manifestations and they increase in glory as we come to know the personal work of Christ.

So what we need to understand is this: in this one consistent eternal covenant of grace, the Old Testament believers came to saving faith just as the New Testament believers do. They were justified by faith and in the personal work of Christ just as the New Testament believers are and just as we are. They receive the same benefit through justification by faith alone in the personal work of Christ. So there is a consistency in God's covenant relationship with us, known as the covenant of grace. There are two manifestations of it, the Old and the New, which we'll see as we go through this but one does not abrogate the other. Jesus said "I didn't come to eliminate the law, I came to fulfill it." We start to see in the beginning of the pages of Genesis when God takes the skins and he begins to be the means by which they can deal with their sin, and you'll begin to see that it becomes more clearly as you work your way through the Scriptures.

And so now we begin to come into an arrangement when Jesus referred to himself as the new arrangement, the new covenant; that does not mean there is anything new to the old, it just means this is now more visibly understood. And he said "this is the new covenant in my blood, sealed in my blood." You and I have a greater understanding of the eternal covenant of grace now because of the sealed blood of Christ, his sacrifice on the Cross. So we understand that more clearly now. Please understand this: God has had one consistent arrangement to draw mankind back into a saving relationship with himself and that is the eternal covenant of grace.

Now we want to talk today about how does that manifest itself in our life. What does that look like in somebody who understands what it means to have a life sealed by the blood of Christ and to understand the eternal covenant of grace? So understand that grace is something that God does for us that we do not deserve. Remember, we need to understand grace in the terms of justice, and mercy and grace.

Justice is getting what you deserve. The Scriptures say "the wages of sin is death" and the New Testament says the same thing. God's one standard of justice is this: we deserve death. So we are nothing more than a hell-bent sinner who deserves death except for the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace. Now that radically changes your life. Justice is getting what you deserve and mercy is not getting all that you deserve. And that is why we are mercy-minded members of a movement motivated by mercy for ministry in the market place; we understand that we are "MAs"[UNCLEAR] Mission minded members of a movement motivated by mercy for ministry in the market place. Because we understand grace, we understand mercy. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. When you understand the context of that, what does our life begin to look like for the outside world to see somebody who understands what it means for someone to live in this covenant of grace?

I would like to take you to Scripture so let's go to 2nd Corinthians and we're going to study passages from Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5; this is Paul's demonstration of his answer to what life in this covenant of grace looks like. He goes through some wonderful illustrations and we'll work our way through this over the next several months, but today I call your attention to Chapter 2 of 2nd Corinthians and we will begin

at verse 12 and read down to about Chapter 3, verse 3. So beginning at Chapter 2, verse 12 of 2nd Corinthians, I'll be reading from the New American Standard version.

"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 in 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 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 and the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for such 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. 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."

May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things from his Word.

Now when you think of the Christian life and people think of the Christian life it conjures up all kinds of ideas. And those ideas are based upon the people with whom they've had contact, what they've taught in their church, what they've learned, what they've heard on the internet with some lesson they've learned they've conjured up some idea of what the Christian life is like. Some of those ideas are good and some are bad. Some of them are true and some of them are false.

Now what I want us to do is to study the passage of Scripture where Paul essentially describes for us a life in this covenant of grace relationship. A life where God supplies all of our needs so that we have a relationship with him that brings glory to him and our primary purpose in life is to love him and enjoy him forever. Now when God fulfills himself within us through grace that begins to shape the way that we live our life, and it takes on a different semblance and a different picture. That's what Paul describes because essentially the context of this passage is this: Paul had once been the primary persecutor of the church and now he was the primary preacher for the church. Now there are many people who asked "how can that be"? How can Paul, who was once the primary persecutor of the church, how can he now be in the position of being the primary preacher for the church let alone be an apostle? That does not seem to be consistent with his life. There were many people who doubted the veracity and the truthfulness of Paul being an apostle and so they come to him and they begin to question him; they begin to attack him and to ask how can this be, Paul, because you were this way and now you're saying this? There seems to be some inconsistency there.

So what does Paul do in this letter to the Church of Corinth in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. He does not defend himself but basically says: Come and take a look at my life. You evaluate my life, you see how I live, you see how I respond to things, you see how my faith manifests itself in the decisions that I make, and then you make a determination as to whether I'm authentic or not. I'm going to leave that up to you. So Paul does not defend himself. And what he does for us is that he gives to us a very, very clear picture of what it means to live under the covenant of grace where God is the one who supplies all of our needs so that we live our life and fulfill all the things that God designed us to be in the initial creation. He is basically saying: This is what it looks like to live under the covenant of grace. And so you make a determination when you come and examine my life. Now how many of us can do that? If

somebody said: why should I believe you're a Christian? How many of us would say: why don't you just come and live with me for a week. Live with me for a week.

During my first pastorate in Kansas City there was a church who was interested in my coming to Chicago to begin a new work. They said we've heard about your preaching, we've heard and read about things you did and we would like you to be a candidate. And I said I've got a better deal for you. Why don't you come down to Kansas City and live with me for a week and then just see how I relate to my neighbor, see how I get along in my job. Why don't you just examine me? And all I did was to try to do what Paul did. I'm just saying come and live with me because you need to know what you're getting: listen to the words I say, listen to the language I use, see how I dress, see how I treat people because if you really want me to be your pastor you need to know those things. You need to know the quality of my life not just what comes out of my mouth as a preacher. You see, essentially that's what Paul was doing. Paul was saying I don't have to defend myself. I just want you to examine the authenticity of my life and then you're going to understand what it means to live a life in the covenant of grace. And what you're going to see is that it's all of God and not of me. And that manifests itself in certain demonstrations that Paul said were certain characteristics of living in the covenant of grace.

And he gives us some of these characteristics, particularly in this chapter. We are going to look at these five, we won't get through all of them today but I want you to see that there are five characteristics that Paul describes as we go through this passage that I just read for you. We'll start it today and it'll take a couple of weeks to go through this. But here are the five descriptions that Paul says are manifestations of you living under the arrangement of God being your source through grace, giving you what you don't deserve.

First of all, it's a thankful life of unquenchable optimism; a thankful life of unquenchable optimism. Secondly, it's a successful life of unvarying triumph; a successful life of unvarying triumph. Thirdly, it's a consequential life of unforgettable impact. You're going to live a life that has tremendous implications, life and death consequences. Do you realize that? Paul is saying this: your life as a Christian has life and death consequences. Who is able to live like that? The answer is you give it to God alone who is more than adequate. Do you realize that? You and I have life and death consequences because we live in the covenant of grace. To some people you're the aroma of death. Some people are going to be turned off because you're in Christ. Some people are going to be drawn to you. You don't control that. So we need to understand it's a consequential life of unforgettable impact. Because you're living under grace you're going to have an unforgettable impact upon society. Fourthly, a faithful life of unimpeachable integrity; a faithful life of unimpeachable integrity. And lastly, an authentic life of undeniable reality; an authentic life of undeniable reality. Now those are the five characteristics that Paul basically describes in the passage I just read.

Let's take our time and go through these one at a time. First of all, he says the first characteristic of life in the covenant of grace is that it's a life that gives thanks in all situations. It's a life of what I'm calling unquestionable optimism. Now I'm not talking about a positive mental attitude. I'm not talking about just saying "I need to think positively." That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about God giving you the resources because this is really unnatural. It is not natural for somebody to be saying thanks in all situations when their life is crumbling around them. That's absolutely not natural. It's a function of God's grace. It's a life of unquestionable optimism.

Now notice in the passage that Paul anticipated the return of Titus from Corinth. You can read it in verses 12 and 13. Notice he says that the door had been opened for him to preach the gospel but there had been a crisis that had developed in the Church of Corinth, and you can read about that in the first Corinthian letter. Paul understood the severity of that would impact the whole church movement of Asia Minor. So here is a man who is an evangelist who basically said there is a wonderful door of opportunity for him to preach the gospel and he walked away, "But thanks be to God who always leads in triumph" Now right in the midst of a wonderful ministry of opportunity, his plans change. I mean look at this, it's an ideal situation and he's an evangelist and he said "there's a door open for me to preach the gospel" but he didn't go through the door.

Now, Brothers just because God opens a door doesn't necessarily mean you need go through it. You've got to understand this: Paul understood that there was a bigger issue at stake than his own personal ministry. He understood that there was a bigger issue and that was "I haven't heard back from Titus about what's going on in the Church in Corinth, and if I don't deal with that it will be a bigger issue than my personal ministry. I've got to deal with that because it's going to affect the whole church of God, the whole church and the development of Asia Minor." So Paul walks away from an open door of ministry and the next thing that comes out of his mouth is this: "But thanks be to God." You see it's the first characteristic of a life in the covenant of grace. It is a life of unquenchable optimism. It's a thankful life and we just say thanks in all situations.

So right in what appeared to be an open door, Paul walked away. Now we would say that he failed. Did you ever have your plans change? It's really hard to say "But thanks be to God" when your plans change after you've done something that you've really planned to happen and it changes. My whole Naval career changed in one instant one day in Vietnam during a flight when I was shot down and wounded. I didn't control that. Now I look back upon that and I can say "Thanks be to God" because I see what has happened to my life since then. Well I have to be honest, the moment I got shot down I didn't say "oh whoop-de-do thanks be to God". [LAUGHTER] That's not what Paul is talking about. Paul's not talking about some phoniness that says "Thank you Jesus my car just blew up." He's not talking about that. He's talking about some deep routed confidence that says "But thanks be to God who always leads."

The reason you have this wonderful sense of optimism is because you know that God always leads; it's not because of what you achieve, it's because of what you receive. Because you know that God always leads and you can say "But thanks be to God who ALWAYS leads us in triumphal procession in Christ." The reason that Paul says the very first characteristic of a life in the life of grace and a life of optimism is because you know that God ALWAYS leads. And so Paul could walk away from the door of personal ministry and not preach the gospel and deal with the bigger issue of dealing with the church because he understood this: God is leading in something bigger than me. It is not about me, it's about the kingdom, and it's something bigger than me. So Paul says he can say "Thanks be to God who always leads in every situation." The first characteristic of life in Christ is the life that gives thanks in all situations. It is the life of unquenchable optimism.

Yes, please: **[Audience Member]** *I don't know if this is relevant but when we talk about giving thanks it seems to me that there is a worldly notion of giving thanks that looks backwards to circumstances. But the Godly version of thanks, yes it looks backwards but primarily it looks forward. You're giving thanks for who he is and what he is going to do and not merely what he has done.*

What he **will** be doing, that's correct. You see that's why Paul said thanks. That's a good point Ian.

He said I'm going to walk away from an opportunity of personal ministry. I'm going to walk away from that because I know there's something bigger going on because God is leading, and I'm going to say thanks for what you're going to do, even though I don't even know what you're going to do yet, but I'm going to say thanks because I know you're going to do it. You see that's the optimism that we have. It's not this phoniness, there is nothing phony about this. This is totally unnatural to have a life that says "Thanks be to God in all situations." The world doesn't understand that, but they'll see that in us.

BILL: [UNCLEAR]. *Can you help me here on this structure of the verb tenses and everything else? I always took it that his personal ministry plans were to continue but when God opened the door through the vision [UNCLEAR] that he received [UNCLEAR] in Acts about coming across and having a change of plans [UNCLEAR] isn't the door being opened by God to redirect his personal ministry and he is now going forward because God has opened this door and he is being an aggressive responder?*

Absolutely, it's the same thing Ian is saying. He's looking forward towards what God is going to do through another opportunity. Now what we see here is..., notice how the verb tenses are. "Now when I came to Troas for the Gospel of Christ, which many had the opportunity to go to that city and preach the gospel..."

BILL: *Well, that's his personal plan.*

That's what I'm saying. His personal plans changed, that's the whole point. His personal plans were changed for something bigger. But God opened another door that was for something that was bigger, and that was to deal with the issue of the Church of Corinth because it was going to impact the whole church movement of Asia Minor. So yes, he said no to his own personal door opening and went to another door opening that God opened. That's why he said "thanks be to God who always leads." He dealt with something bigger because God provided another opportunity. And all he was here was an aggressive responder as he says "I did not have this peace in my spirit." That's because the Holy Spirit was leading him to do something differently and he became an aggressive responder to that. So he said no to something that was very personal in favor of something that was bigger than himself. And that was the whole issue of the church development of Asia Minor. He said "I had no rest in my spirit, not finding Titus my brother..." because he was waiting for Titus to come back and give him the report. And he said when he didn't get that report he knew he had to do something different. So the whole point here is sometimes your and my personal plans will change because God is leading.

How do we respond to that? It's unnatural to say "Thanks be to God" because I just gave up my 10 years of planning, I just gave up 16 years of my Naval career because I wanted to go to the Naval Academy and become an admiral. That was removed from me in one day because I could no longer fly after that. Gone. My personal plans...I spent 16 years, my high school, my college, my training as a Navy...all my training went for one thing and all of a sudden it was gone. Now I'll have to admit that I didn't say "But thanks be to God" immediately, but Paul is saying you need to understand that in the midst of your changed plans God always leads and he leads in triumph. And so that means that you and I have a thankful life of unquenchable optimism. We may not necessarily know what lies ahead of us down the road but we do know this: the reason I can be optimistic is because I know God leads. It's not my response. It's the fact I know God leads. You see that's unnatural. That's grace. That's grace to be able to say that. It's very unnatural to do that.

Let me give you an illustration that is very, very real. You see, life in Christ is not life in this world but its life in him. And the reason for our optimism is that God leads in triumphal procession in Christ. Paul is not thinking about some phony optimism that says “whoop de do.” He says “I see that God is doing something different in my life, in my personal plans and I’m going to be an aggressive responder because I know he leads”.

When I went to flight school, the last phase of your naval aviation training is your carrier qualifications where you do your carrier landing. It’s the last thing you do. After months of training, you do your first solo. John McCain, who was my flight instructor, said that if you walk away from a carrier landing, it’s a good one. On my first one I walked away and it wasn’t the smoothest thing but I walked away and I survived.

I had a classmate who was a dear friend of mine and who was a Christian. We went to a Bible study together at the Naval Academy. On his first solo flight he crashed and was killed, on his very first solo. It devastated all of us because he was such a dear friend, just a great guy. I knew he was in eternity. We went to his funeral and about six of us were pallbearers at his funeral, and we laid him in his grave and went back to his home with his mother. Now I knew his mother very, very well and she was a godly woman. One of my Naval Academy friends who was a non-believer but who was a good guy and a very good friend of my deceased classmate, went up to the mother of the young man who had just been buried in the ground and he tried to console her; and I respect him for wanting to say something to ease the pain of the mother because her plans had changed. She had just lost her son, she just put him in the ground but she knew he was in eternity. So he went up to her and said this: “You know this is just purely an accident, things like this don’t happen. We don’t know what went wrong but don’t worry about it, he didn’t make a mistake it was just an accident.” And with tears coming down her eyes she put her hands on the face of this young man and looked him right in the eye and said this: “If you remove God from the backseat of my son’s plane, I have no hope.” If you remove God from the backseat of my son’s plane, I have no hope. Here’s a woman whose plans were radically changed because she just lost her son, but in her spirit she could say: “But thanks be to God who always leads in triumphal procession.”

You see there is this spirit of deep rooted confidence because you know in God’s providence, God leads. Now the rest of the story is this: that blew that young man out of the water. And when we went back to Pensacola, he came to me numerous times and said “Bruce I don’t understand that. How could she say that?” He started coming to a Bible study and the Lord was pleased to use that incident as the means of granting him saving faith. Because he said this: “That is so unnatural. That is absolutely out of this world.” And several of us had a chance to introduce him to the doctrine of grace and let him see the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the personal work of Christ in repentance and faith. Now, that dear brother is a pastor in Seattle, Washington. He has been there for 27 years. It all started because of our response to having plans changed. You see that’s the magnificence of the covenant of grace. You cannot explain that stuff because it’s all of God. You see, that’s what God has been doing since he’s been dealing with Adam and Eve when he gave them skins. And he said here’s the means by which you are going to deal with your sin and the means by which you can have a saving relationship with me, and the means by which I’m going to supply you with all the resources of your life. And your life is now no longer going to be in this world, it will be in the Christ. Yes, Don.

DON: [UNCLEAR]....that’s what I have to admit [UNCLEAR] *with my friend Erin* [UNCLEAR]. *Here was a very good man, he was 30 years old, he had cancer* [UNCLEAR]. *He had a one year old son* [UNCLEAR]. *I had to ask “why”* [UNCLEAR]. *I know I won’t get the answer but* [UNCLEAR]. *And yet I see already what*

is going on. It's vocalized at my church, people [UNCLEAR] bringing meals, spending time with him, doing everything, the faith that God has given his wife [UNCLEAR]. It just blows me out of the water and God is doing something here, God is doing something tremendous here and so [UNCLEAR] kind of attitude is not natural but it is of God and God's grace.

That's what it is folks. Yes, Bill.

BILL: *I think there are a couple of things here that are all tied together. You've taught us in the past about the illustration of the apple tree. The mother didn't look at the situation and say how can I save this young aviator for the kingdom; she was just the apple tree. She was just being who she was naturally. (Bruce: Exactly.) This is what Paul is telling us to do, to be who we are naturally because around us, If you read that passage again that you did read to us Bruce... if I can re-read it for you. (Bruce: Please.) Take a look once again, I'm always crazy about verb tense. It says: "We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are being perished." The issue is that God is working with people around us all the time and we are, as was this lady's example that you gave, just the apple tree. And we're having an impact without doing anything other than being who we are. And once again looking back at the story about Aaron, he was being who was: God's reflection, God's child, in a tough situation and it's having an impact on people around him. God is at work around us, he's the one that's operative, he's the one laying out the seeds. It is just a beautiful understanding here of what we are in life. Many times people ask the awkward question why do we exist and if God is sovereign and working [UNCLEAR].*

We are going to get into the unforgettable impact that he's eluding to when we talk about the aroma. Because some people will be turned off and you don't control that, unless you're an idiot and you do something stupid. [LAUGHTER] But the other thing is this: some people are going to be drawn to you and you don't control that either. You see, God always leads and that's the point. The point is this: just be who you are in Christ. Life in the new covenant, life in the covenant of grace, is not life in this world but it's life in Christ. He provides us with all the resources that we need to become all that he desires us to be, so that we have the influence upon society. That's why you've heard me say for 17 years the most important thing that you and I should ask everyday is this: what is God doing around me? The most natural thing is just to respond to see what God is doing around you. You don't need to come up with some structured plan such as I've got to do this or I've got to do that and if I don't do this I'm a failure. You see, we build some of these things [UNCLEAR] if I do this for God then he's going to be pleased.

What you need to do is just walk by faith. That's what Paul is saying. Paul is saying this: the first characteristic of life in the covenant of grace is a thankful life of unquenchable optimism. It isn't because of what you achieve it's because you know that God leads. That is your confidence. You see, this is radically different and so we'll work our way through it. That's why I'm saying the title of this series is Triumph Living because that takes us to our next characteristic, and you will see that when he talks about a successful life, a life of unvarying triumph. It goes from a thankful life of unquenchable optimism to a successful life of unvarying triumph.

Now the theme of this in the original language is this: God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumphal procession. In other words there is not one time when God does not lead because God always, ALWAYS, always leads. So the reason that you and I are successful is not because of what we achieve, it's because of the fact that God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph. That's the basis of your success, so you and I have a successful life of unvarying triumph. It always triumphs because he leads. It means on every

occasion, it means that the success of our life is not because we accomplish something but because God leads. And we become an aggressive responder because we see what God doing around us.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: ([UNCLEAR].

I'm going to get to that, hold onto that, it's the whole point of this one.

Let me explain this. Now we have a tendency to look for triumphs that don't look like that. We look for quick numbers, we look for immediate responses, we look for great programs, we look for responses that are world-characterized or driven by the system of this world. Paul was talking about something totally different.

Let me give you an example of what I mean because sometimes God's triumphs won't look like ours. Turn to Luke 24. (UNCLEAR). I'll get to that in a moment. Luke 24, verses 13 to 25. Now notice we have a tendency to define triumph based upon the world's system. I'll give you an example where God's triumphs do not necessarily look like what we perceive our triumphs to be like. Beginning in verse 13 of Chapter 24 of Luke: "And behold two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem and they were talking with each other about all the things that had just taken place." And that was about the crucifixion of Christ. "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself approached and begin traveling with them; but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. And he said to them 'What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?' "And they stood still looking sad. One of them named Cleopas answered and said to him, 'are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days? ' "And he said to them 'What things'? "And they said to him, 'the things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was the prophet mighty in deed and word and in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to the sentence of death and crucified him'..."

Now here is their expectation of a triumph. "...but we were hoping that it was he who was going to redeem Israel and, indeed besides all this it is the third day since these things happened." Here was their anticipated triumph. This prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, is going to redeem Israel. For them that meant leading a governmental overthrow and a military coup and all sorts of things based upon our worldly standard. What had Jesus just done by going to the cross, paying for their sin, and being resurrected? What had he just done? He had just redeemed Israel! He just redeemed them! And they had the audacity to say: "We were hoping he would redeem Israel!" You see, friends, you've got to understand this: God's triumphs does not necessarily look like our triumphs. You've got to have spiritual eyes and a spiritual heart that sees things through the eyes of God and see them as a triumph rather than defining them by the things of this world.

Let me give you an illustration that he gives us here. He says "Thanks be to God that he always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ." Now Paul is using a description here of a military parade. Historically it was called a triumphal procession, and it was in honor of a Roman general who brought some new land to the Roman Empire and either killed or captured at least a minimum of 5,000 enemy troupes. And when that occurred they had this magnificent triumphal procession along the via socra to the capital of Rome. It was given only to a commanding general, if at all, once in his lifetime.

He was given the title of Supreme Commander of the Roman Army. And this magnificent parade was being held because they were honoring him on behalf of the Roman government because of his military

conquests. He would come into this parade riding a gold-laden chariot driven by four white horses and right in front of him were the 5,000 captives that he brought, and they were in their fetters and chains and they were marching in front of him. In front of them were all your politicians, all your priests, and all your dignitaries. Politicians are always in every parade, aren't they? [LAUGHTER] So it looked like this: you had your politicians, your priests, your high government officials, you had all your captive slaves at least 5,000, then you had this general and this gold-laden chariot driven by four white horses. And then behind him came his army, the Roman Army, who defeated the enemy; all in their battle dress and marching uniform. So you had thousands of people in this parade. People along the way would throw incense and flowers in front of these marching feet. And when you step on incense and flowers what happens? There is an aroma given off, and I'll get to that next week so don't rush me. [LAUGHTER]. We'll take our time. We're still at the parade!

Now Paul is using this expression and he says this: "But thanks be to God who always leads in triumphal procession in Christ." Now let's stop right there. There is this magnificent parade. Now Paul's point is this: "God always leads in triumph." You've got two kinds of people in this parade: those in front of the commanding general are going to reveal his triumph, his triumph over them because they are his captives. Now do you see that? They are captive. He reveals his triumph over them. Those back here in his army share in his triumph. But either way it's a what? It's a triumph. The issue is this: what side of the parade are you on? If you're on this side of the parade, you're going to reveal his triumph because he overcame you. If you're on this side of the parade, you're going to share in his triumph because he overcame you and you are now with him. That's the example of the history of mankind.

There are two kinds of people in this world, either way God reveals a triumph. To those over here who reject Christ it's a what? It's a triumph because his holiness, his righteousness, and his justice are put on display and that's a triumph. Any time God's characteristics are put on display, it's a triumph because God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph. Those people who reject Christ, that's a triumph because God is revealing the fact that he triumphed over their sinfulness with his justice, his righteousness and his holiness. That's a triumph. And those who are overcome by his grace, his mercy, and his love that's a triumph because you now share in that triumph that he overcame you. But either way Paul says this: "God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph." The real issue in your life is this: what side of the parade am I on? Am I one of the captives who reveal God's triumph over my sin; or am I one who has been overcome by God's grace and I now share in his triumph as a kingdom citizen?

Now we'll get into this later but at the end of the day the aroma... well...we'll deal with that next week. [LAUGHTER]. I want to take the time and go through this but do you understand what Paul is saying? He's saying that when Christ goes through life he always leads in triumph. And his triumphs does not necessarily look like our triumphs, and you and I have to have eyes of faith to be able to see triumph in God's point of view as opposed to looking at it in the world's point of view.

Let me give you a case of a massive evangelistic crusade. We'll have Heinz Field and will have 50,000 people come to a crusade. At the end of the crusade we'll say that 25,000 people came forward to accept Christ. And we say that's a great triumph. My question is: what about the other 25,000 who rejected Christ; what's that? That is a triumph! You see the triumph was this: the gospel was proclaimed. That's the triumph! It's not the response. You see people who reject Christ, that's as much as a triumph over those who accept Christ because of his demonstration of his justice, his holiness, and his righteousness were put on display because he overcame their stand. That's a triumph even in their rejection. It's also a triumph of those who came forward. You see we have a cockeyed view of

evangelism. We think it's based upon a response. That's not the triumph. The triumph is this: the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed. That's the only way you can evaluate ministry, truth proclaimed. So evaluation of an evangelistic crusade is: yes, we taught the doctrine of the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the personal work of Christ, and repentance in faith. That's the triumph and we'll see in eternity how it works out because God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph.

So the first two characteristics (but just one covenant) that Paul says about life in the covenant of grace, the eternal covenant of grace, manifested now because of the shed blood of Christ and we fully understand it better than we did before because of the incarnation and the personal work of Christ, we understand that now. That has tremendous implications in your life. And the first one is this: you and I now are positioned to live a thankful life of unquenchable optimism, and now we have been positioned to live a successful life of unvarying triumph because God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph. Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: *Would you repeat number 4?* {UNCLEAR}.

Yes, unimpeachable integrity.

We'll go through all five of these, we just went through the first two today and so we'll pick it up next week and we'll go through the next one: a life of unforgettable impact, the consequential life. I want you to understand this, brothers: based upon what we've learned so far you are the most powerful force in the world because you will have a life of unforgettable impact...a consequential life; the tremendous consequences of being on this side of the parade to the world. We'll see that next week. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for our Brother Paul, who had the courage to not defend himself but just said come and examine me and then you decide. Father, may we be bold enough and may we be courageous enough when someone says why should I believe you? And we could say with Paul, just come and examine me and then you decide to see whether I'm authentic or not for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said: Amen!