

The Life That Wins

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By Charles G. Trumbull

There is only one life that wins and that is the life of Jesus Christ. Every man may have that life; every man may live that life.

I do not mean that every man may be Christ-like; I mean something very much better than that. I do not mean that a man may always have Christ's help. I mean something better than that. I do not mean that a man have power from Christ. I mean something very much better than power. And I do not mean that a man shall be merely saved from his sins and kept from sinning. I mean something better than even that victory.

To explain what I do mean, I must simply tell you a very personal and recent experience of my own. I think I am correct when I say that I have known more than most men know about failure, about betrayals and dishonoring of Christ, about disobedience to heavenly visions, about conscious falling short of that which I saw other men attaining, and which I knew Christ was expecting of me.

Not a great while ago I should have had to stop just there, and only say I hoped that some day I would be led out of all that into something better. If you had asked me how, I would have had to say I did not know. But, thanks to His long-suffering patience and infinite love and mercy, I do not have to stop there, but I can go on to speak of something more than a miserable story of personal failure and disappointment.

The conscious needs of my life, before there came the new experience of Christ of which I would tell you, were definite enough. Three stand out:

1. There were great fluctuations in my spiritual life, in my conscious closeness of fellowship with God. Sometimes I would be on the heights spiritually; sometimes I would be in the depths. A strong, arousing convention, a stirring, searching address from some consecrated, victorious Christian leader of men, a searching, Spirit-filled book, or the obligation to do a difficult piece of Christian service myself, with the preparation in prayer that it involved, would lift me up; and I would stay up – for a while – and God would seem very close and my spiritual life deep. But it wouldn't last. Sometimes by some single failure before temptation, sometimes by a gradual downhill process, my best experiences would be lost, and I would find myself back on the lower levels. And a lower level is a perilous place for a Christian to be, as the devil showed me over and over again.

It seemed to me that it ought to be possible for me to live habitually on a high place of close fellowship with God, as I saw certain other men doing, and as I was not doing. Those men were exceptional, to be sure; they were in the minority among the Christians whom I knew. But

I wanted to be in that minority. Why shouldn't we all be, and turn it into a majority?

2. Another conscious lack of my life was in the matter of failure before besetting sins. I was not fighting a winning fight in certain lines. Yet if Christ was not equal to a winning fight, what were my Christian beliefs and professions good for? I did not look for perfection. But I did believe that I could be enabled to win in certain directions habitually. Yes, always, instead of uncertainly and interruptedly, the victories interspersed with crushing and humiliating defeats. Yet I had prayed, oh, so earnestly, for deliverance; and the habitual deliverance had not come.

3. A third conscious lack was in the matter of dynamic, convincing spiritual power that would work miracle changes in other men's lives. I was doing a lot of Christian work – had been at it ever since I was a boy of fifteen. I was going through the motions – oh, yes. So can anybody. I was even doing personal work – the hardest kind of all; talking with people, one by one, about giving themselves to my Savior! But I wasn't seeing results. Once in a great while I would see a little in the way of result, of course; but not much. I didn't see lives made over by Christ, revolutionized, turned into firebrands for Christ themselves because of my work; and it seemed to me I ought to. Other men did, why not I? I comforted myself with the old assurance (so much used by the devil) that it wasn't for me to see results; that I could safely leave that to the Lord if I did my part. But this didn't satisfy me, and I was sometimes heartsick over the spiritual barrenness of my Christian service.

About a year before, I had begun, in various ways, to get intimations that certain men to whom I looked upon were conspicuously blessed in their Christian service and seemed to have a conception or consciousness of Christ that I did not have, that was beyond, bigger, deeper than any thought of Christ I had ever had. I rebelled at the suggestion when it first came to me. How could anyone have a better idea of Christ than I? (I am just laying bare to you the blind, self-satisfied workings of my sin-stunted mind and heart.)

Did I not believe in Christ and worship Him as the Son of God and one with God? Had I not accepted Him as my personal Saviour more than twenty years before? Did I not believe that in Him alone was eternal life, and was I not trying to live in His service, giving my whole life to Him? Did I not ask His help and guidance constantly, and believe that in Him was my only hope? Was I not championing the very cause of the highest possible conception of Christ, by conducting in the columns of *The Sunday School Times* a symposium on the Deity of Christ, in which the leading Bible scholars of the world were testifying to their personal belief in Christ as God's Son?

All this I was doing; how could a higher or better conception of Christ than mine be possible? I knew that I needed to serve Him far better than I had ever done, but that I needed a new conception of Him I would not admit.

And yet it kept coming at me, from directions that I could not ignore, I heard from a preacher of power a sermon on Ephesians 4:12-13:

"Unto the building up of the body of Christ, till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;"

And as I followed it I was amazed, bewildered. I couldn't follow him. He was beyond my depth. He was talking about Christ, unfolding Christ, in a way that I admitted was utterly unknown to me.

Whether he was right or wrong I wasn't quite ready to say that night, but if he was right, then I was wrong.

Later I read another sermon by this same man on "Paul's Conception of the Lord Jesus Christ." As I read it, I was conscious of the same uneasy realization that he and Paul were talking about a Christ whom I simply did not know. Could they be right? If they were right, how could I get their knowledge?

One day I came to know another minister whose work among men had been greatly blessed. I learned from him that what he counted his greatest spiritual asset was his habitual consciousness of the actual presence of Jesus. Nothing so bore him up, he said, as the realization that Jesus was always with him in actual presence, and that this was so, independent of his own feelings, independent of his deserts, and independent of his own notions as to how Jesus would manifest His Presence.

Moreover, he said that Christ was the home of his thoughts. Whenever his mind was free from other matters, it would turn to Christ and he would talk aloud to Christ when he was alone – on the street, anywhere – as easily and naturally as to a human friend. So real to him was Jesus' actual presence.

Some months later I was in Edinburgh, attending the World Missionary Conference, and I saw that one whose writings had helped me greatly was to speak to men Sunday afternoon on "The Resources of the Christian Life." I went eagerly to hear him. I expected him to give us a series of definite things that we could do to strengthen our Christian life; and I knew I needed them. But his opening words showed me my mistake, while they made my heart leap with a new joy. What he said was something like this:

"The resources of the Christian life, my friends, are just – Jesus Christ."

That was all. But that was enough, I hadn't grasped it yet; but it was what all these men had been trying to tell me. Later, as I talked with the speaker about my personal needs and difficulties he said, earnestly and simply, "Oh, Mr. Trumbull, if we would only step out upon Christ in a more daring faith, He could do so much more for us."

Before leaving Great Britain I was confronted once more with the thought that was beyond me, a Christ whom I did not yet know, in a sermon that a friend of mine preached in his London church on a Sunday evening in June. His text was Philippians 1:21:

"To me to live is Christ,"

It was the same theme – the unfolding of "the life that is Christ," Christ as the whole life and the only life. I did not understand all that he said, and I knew vaguely that I did not have as my own what he was telling us about. But I wanted to read the sermon again, and I brought the manuscript away with me when I left him.

It was about the middle of August that a crisis came with me, I was attending a young people's Missionary conference, and was faced by a week of daily work there for which I knew I was miserably, hopelessly unfit and incompetent. For the few weeks previous had been one of my periods of spiritual let-down, not uplift, with all the loss and failure and defeat that such a time is sure to record.

The first evening that I was there a Missionary bishop spoke to us on the Water of Life. He told us that it was Christ's wish and purpose that every follower of His should be a wellspring of living, gushing water of life all the time to others, not intermittently, not interruptedly, but with continuous and irresistible flow. We have Christ's own word for it, he said, as he quoted, "He that believeth on me, from within him shall flow rivers of living water."

He told how some have a little of the water of life, bringing it up in small bucketsful and at intervals, like the irrigating water-wheel of India, with a good deal of creaking and grinding, while from the lives of others it flows all the time in a life-bringing, abundant stream that nothing can stop. And he described a little old native woman in the East whose marvelous ministry in witnessing for Christ put to shame those of us who listened. Yet she had known Christ for only a year.

The next morning, Sunday, alone in my room, I prayed it out with God, as I asked Him to show me the way out. If there was a conception of Christ that I did not have, and that I needed because it was the secret of some of these other lives I had seen or heard of, a conception better than any I had yet had, and beyond me, I asked God to give it to me. I had with me the sermon I had heard, "To me to live is Christ," and I rose from my knees and studied it. Then I prayed again. And God, in His long-suffering patience, forgiveness, and love, gave me what I asked for. He gave me a new Christ -- wholly new in the conception and consciousness of Christ that now became mine.

Wherein was the change? It is hard to put it into words, and yet it is, oh, so new, and real, and wonderful, and miracle-working in both my own life and the lives of others.

To begin with, I realized for the first time that the many references throughout the New Testament to Christ in you, and you in Christ, Christ our life, and abiding in Christ, are literal, actual, blessed fact, and not figures of speech. How the 15th chapter of John thrilled with new life as I read it now! And the 3rd of Ephesians, 14 to 21. And Galatians 2:20. And Philippians 1:21.

["1 I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Husbandman. 2 Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the Vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. 5 I am the Vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. 10 If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. 12 This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you. 16 Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you. 17 These things I command you, that ye love one another. 18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20 Remember the Word that

I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me. 22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. 23 He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. 25 But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their Law, They hated Me without a cause. 26 But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: 27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:1-27).]

["14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in Heaven and Earth is named, 16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all Saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 20 Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21 Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:14-21).

["I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).]

["For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).]

What I mean is this: I had always known that Christ was my Saviour; but I had looked upon Him as an external Saviour, one who did a saving work for me from outside, as it were; one who was ready to come close alongside and stay by me, helping me in all that I needed, giving me power and strength and salvation.

But now I know something better than that. At last I realized that Jesus Christ was actually and literally within me; and even more than that, that He had constituted Himself my very life, taking me into union with Himself – my body, mind, and spirit – while I still had my own identity and free will and full moral responsibility.

Was not this better than having Him as a helper, or even then having Him as an external Saviour, to have Him, Jesus Christ, the Son of God as my own very life?

It meant that I need never again ask Him to help me as though He were one and I another, but rather simply to do His work, His will, in me, and with me, and through me. My body was His, my mind His, my will His, my spirit His; and not merely His, but literally part of His; what He asked me to recognize was:

"I have been crucified with Christ and It is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth In me."

Jesus Christ had constituted Himself my life – not as a figure of speech, remember, but as a literal,

actual fact, as literal as the fact that a certain tree has been made into this desk on which my hand rests. For "your bodies are members of Christ," and "ye are the body of Christ."

Do you wonder that Paul could say with tingling joy and exultation, "to me to live is Christ"? He did not say, as I had mistakenly been supposing I must say, "To me to live is to be Christ-like," nor, "to me to live is to have Christ's help," nor, "To me to live is to serve Christ." No, he plunged through and beyond all that in the bold, glorious, mysterious claim:

"To me to live is Christ!"

I had never understood that verse before. Now, thanks to His gift of Himself, I am beginning to enter into a glimpse of its wonderful meaning.

And that is how I know for myself that there is a life that wins; that it is the life of Jesus Christ; and that it may be our life for the asking, if we let Him – in absolute, unconditional surrender of ourselves to Him, our wills to His will, making Him the Master of our lives as well as our Saviour – enter in, occupy us, overwhelm us with Himself, yea, fill us with Himself "unto all the fullness of God."

What has the result been? Did this experience give me only a new intellectual conception of Christ, more interesting and satisfying than before? If it were only that, I should have little to tell you today. No, it meant a revolutionized, fundamentally changed life, within and without. If any man be in Christ, you know, there is a new creation.

Do not think that I am suggesting any mistaken, unbalanced theory that, when a man receives Christ as the fullness of his life, he cannot sin again. The 'life that is Christ' still leaves us our free will, with that free will we can resist Christ; and my life, since the new experience of which I speak, has recorded sins of such resistance.

But I have learned that the restoration after failure can be supernaturally blessed, instantaneous, and complete. I have learned that, as I trust Christ in surrender, there need be no fighting against sin, but complete freedom from the power and even the desire of sin. I have learned that this freedom, this more than conquering, is sustained in unbroken continuance as I simply recognize that Christ is my cleansing, reigning life.

The three great lacks of needs of which I spoke at the opening have been miraculously met.

1. There has been a fellowship with God utterly differing from and infinitely better than anything I had ever known in all my life before.
2. There has been an utterly new kind of victory, victory-by-freedom, over certain besetting sins – the old ones that used to throttle and wreck me – when I have trusted Christ for the freedom.
3. And, lastly the spiritual results in service have given me such a sharing of the joy of Heaven as I never knew was possible on earth. Six of my most intimate friends, most of them mature Christians, soon had their lives completely revolutionized by Christ, laying hold on Him in this new way and receiving Him unto all the fullness of God.

Two of these were a mother and a son – a young businessman twenty-five-years old. Another was

the general manager of one of the large business houses in Philadelphia. Though consecrated and active as a Christian for years, he began letting Christ work out through him in a new way into the lives of his many associates, and of his salesmen all over the country. A white-haired man of over seventy found a peace in life and a joy in prayer that he had long ago given up as impossible for him. Life fairly teems with the miracle-evidences of what Christ is willing and able to do for other lives through anyone who just turns over the keys to his complete Indwelling.

Jesus Christ does not want to be our helper; He wants to be our life. He does not want us to work for Him. He wants us to let Him do His work through us, using us as we use a pencil to write with; better still, using us as one of the fingers on His hand.

When our life is not only Christ's but Christ, our life will be a winning life, for He cannot fail.

And a winning life is a fruit-bearing life, a serving life. It is after all only a small part of life, and a wholly negative part, to overcome; we must also bear fruit in character and in service if Christ is our life. And we shall – because Christ is our life:

"He cannot deny himself"; He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,"

An utterly new kind of service will be ours now, as we let Christ serve others through us, using us. And this fruit-bearing and service, habitual and constant, must all be by faith in Him; our works are the result of His Life in us; not the condition, or the secret, or the cause of that Life.

The conditions of thus receiving Christ as the fullness of the life are simply two – after, of course, our personal acceptance of Christ as our Saviour – through His shed blood and death as our Substitute and Sin-Bearer, from the guilt and consequences of our sin.

1. Surrender absolutely and unconditionally to Christ as Master of all that we are and all that we have, telling God that we are now ready to have His whole will done in our entire life, at every point, no matter what it costs.
2. Believe that God has set us wholly free from the law of sin (Romans 8:2) – not will do this, but has done it. [**"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death"** (Romans 8:2).]

Upon this second step, the quiet act of faith, all now depends. Faith must believe God in entire absence of any feeling or evidence. For God's word is safer, better, and surer than any evidence of His word. We are to say, in blind, cold faith if need be, "Know that my Lord Jesus is meeting all my needs now (even my need of faith), because His grace is sufficient for me."

And remember that Christ Himself is better than any of His blessings; better than the power, or the victory, or the service, that He grants.