

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

March 2007

PASTORAL LETTERS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL TO SALVATIONISTS ACROSS THE WORLD

This is the first in what will be a series of Pastoral Letters from the General to every Salvationist across the world.

The Pastoral Letters are intended to be distributed unchanged and entire to all Salvationists and may be shared also with others interested in the sacred purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army.

INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ.

This comes to all Salvationists with my strong affection in Christ for you, and with my prayers for your effectiveness in the sacred calling that God, in his supreme wisdom, has placed upon the peoples known as Salvationists.

It has been laid upon my heart that I am to take a step of obedience under God by reaching out to you all through a Pastoral Letter written from time to time. I write therefore in order to obey the One who created us all, and with a longing that what is written will affirm, encourage and inspire you.

The themes for these occasional Pastoral Letters will be the themes God reveals. His holy will is made known in many ways. I pledge myself to be mindful that his will is often revealed through interaction with members of the Body and not only or always in the seclusion of the place of prayer.

It is my deep hope that each Pastoral Letter will be read wherever Salvationists are to be found, whether in private or in public settings. The chosen themes may prompt discussion, prayer and – as appropriate – action.

All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise stated.

Shaw Clifton
General

PASTORAL LETTER ONE

VICTORY

It is natural for each follower of the Lord Jesus Christ to have a deep longing for a life of spiritual victory. I share this longing with you. It has been planted within us by the Holy Spirit. He has rooted that holy desire deep down in our souls. It is a good desire. It gives us a feeling of holy discontentedness in order to drive us on to better things in our walk with God.

In his sacred heart, God also has a longing for each of us to be victorious. He offers us a life of victory over temptation, over sin, and over self. This becomes possible when we are living under the feet of Christ, in submission to the Saviour (Ephesians 1:22). To be victorious we must submit to Christ.

None of this would be possible without the dying and rising of our Lord.

I am writing to fellow Salvationists in the weeks leading to Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the period often referred to (in English) as Lent. It is a time when we prepare to commemorate the self-giving of Jesus on the Cross of Calvary. We want to arrive at Good Friday in a spiritual condition that allows us to obtain maximum benefit from everything that is remembered on that solemn day. It is the same for the celebrations of Easter Day.

Therefore, as the weeks now pass by, I invite all Salvationists to think of victory. Let us think together of all that has been won for us by Jesus. 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' (1 Corinthians 15:54). Jesus has done this for us. Death has been defeated: 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?' (15:55). Let the Army give thanks together to God for he 'gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (15:57).

Do you live each day in a way that proves this to be true? Or is this greatest truth a mere theory to you?

Is your life a life of victory? Or are you experiencing defeat? We do not have to live in defeat, as though Good Friday and Easter Day – Crucifixion and Resurrection – had never happened.

My prayer is that we will each stand firm in the victory of Jesus, letting nothing move us, and that we will give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because our labour in the Lord is not in vain (15:58). A dying, defeated world needs your victorious life. Your family, your friends, your work colleagues, even your fellow believers need the splendid, humble example of your victorious life. Jesus can help you.

He has spoken to us about victory. In preparing yourself for Good Friday and Easter Day why not read again the early chapters of the Book of Revelation? Recently I revisited the seven short letters to the churches that are found in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. Each letter has a powerful, warning message, but *I urge you to search for the wonderful promises to those who are victorious for Christ.*

Two churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) receive warm commendation from the Lord, but five (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea) do not. Two have victory, but five have known defeat.

The church at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) faced persecution, slander, and poverty but they remained truly 'rich' as they lived victoriously in Christ despite everything. Jesus promised them *'the crown of life'*, the laurels of victory! That same crown can be yours, and mine too!

The church at Philadelphia (3:7-13) was affirmed by the Lord because they had kept his word and had not denied his name, even though they had 'little strength' to call their own (v. 8). Notice the promise in verse 12: the overcomer, the victor, will be made a *'pillar in the temple of my God'*. How we long to be victors in Christ! It can be done!

The church at Ephesus (2:1-7) had a liking for hard work and refused to tolerate false teaching, but they had forsaken their 'first love' and were now commanded to 'do the things you did at first' (v. 5). They are given a wonderful promise: 'To him who overcomes, I will give *the right to eat from the tree of life'* (v.7). There is eternal life if we are victorious! It is offered to us all!

The church at Pergamum (2:12-17) had stood firm in persecution, but had allowed false teaching to infiltrate their ranks. Again, the Lord holds out a gracious promise of *'manna'* (v.17) to believers who prove to be overcomers. He feeds those who find victory in him! You can enjoy this divine provision for the feeding of your soul!

The church in Thyatira (2:18-29) had made progress in many ways (v.19), but had permitted sexual immorality to creep into the membership (v.20). However, to those who remained victorious the Lord would give *'authority over the nations'* (v.26) and *'the morning star'* (v.28)! Jesus himself is 'the bright Morning Star' (22:16)! He gives us himself, to indwell us and keep us victorious! Let us open our hearts afresh to him!

The church at Sardis (3:1-6) was reported to be alive and well but was in fact dead (v.1). Jesus called upon them to repent. This time the Lord's promise for the victorious ones is that they will be 'dressed in white' (v.5) and for the overcomer that the Lord *'will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels'* (v.5). O, how we long for victory, in order to be claimed by Jesus as one of his very own!

Finally, the church at Laodicea (3:14-22) was 'neither cold nor hot' (v.15). They lacked true passion. Without Spirit-filled passion there is no victory. Again the Lord is gracious and ready to forgive, for he promises to the victorious one *'the right to sit with me on my throne'* (v.21). Imagine it! Imagine the honour of sitting beside Jesus in Glory! It is the destiny of those who know victory in Christ! It is our destiny!

I am praying that you and I will know victory in Jesus day by day, and that we will go on to claim the incomparable rewards for all who are true to him .

The Lord bless you and keep you.