

Winning Christ.

Andrew Bonar:

'..and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.'

Philipp. 3:8

For a man to have 'won Christ,' in the scriptural sense of the term, would be the same thing as 'already attained,' and as 'already perfect.'

So Christ is this subject, 'Winning Christ.' Why, then, attempt to handle so great a subject? We seek to be enabled, by the grace and Spirit of God, to point out what a pursuit it is, that all may engage in it for themselves. The Alpine guide can take the traveller to a point from which he will see the scenery of the prospect that is so immense; but he does not undertake to look for the traveller. If I had been a shepherd lad at Bethlehem in the day when Christ was born, I could have done what the star did for the wise men. I could have said, 'There is the spot where the babe new-born King of the Jews is lying,' and then have left it to themselves to go in and gaze, and drink in the mystery of godliness which was before them. That is all we do in speaking of 'winning Christ.'

1. 'Winning Christ' is not finding Christ, nor is it being found in Christ. These are the two extremes. The one is the starting-point, and the other - being found in Him - is the goal. But between these two lies the 'winning Christ.' Paul, who uses that expression in Philippians 3:8, at the time he so wrote, had been about thirty years in Christ. Thirty years before, he had found Christ, and Christ had found him, on the road to Damascus. He had been the ringleader of self-righteousness, a man who, of all sinners in the world, was the most determined enemy of Jesus, the righteous One. How he was arrested on the road to Damascus, how for three days he lay in darkness, feeling what he was as a sinner, is known to all. Any one passing up the street called Strait, might hear from that house groanings as of a deadly wounded man. It is Saul of Tarsus, into whose soul God's arrows have sunk. But at the end of the three days it pleased God to reveal His Son in Him. He got such a discovery of Christ that, from that hour, he never took off his eye, but lived his life 'looking unto Jesus.' He saw in Him what made him lose all conceit of whatever he had known of earthly glory. Has there been such a time in your life? Can every one who reads these lines say, 'There has been in my lifetime a period, when I was made to know that hitherto I had been blind, and then was made to see the Lord Jesus all my righteousness, all my strength?'

After that day it was Paul's constant aim to go on in Christ; that he might be found in Him when the Lord should call him, or come for him. He went on in this pursuit of Christ, never taking his eye off Him. If you had met him the third day after that wonderful change, you would have found him gazing upon Christ, and discovering new glory in Him. Had you met him thirty years after, when he penned the words which the Holy Ghost gave him, 'That I may win Christ,' you would have seen him still gazing on the same Christ. He had not changed the object of his gaze, and he meant to continue thus till he was 'found in Christ.'

Very often it happens in the experience of believers who are running this race, that they fail, after a few years, to see what Paul saw in Christ. Sometimes they begin to look aside to something they have done. Very often you find a believing man, insensibly, unconsciously, trusting in his trust. Another is getting spiritually proud, though not aware of it - he fancies he has attained to some superior grace, and is no longer satisfied with what he began with. He is not quite content with seeing in Christ the same that he saw at the first, - 'Christ made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' - Christ 'made a curse for us,' that the blessing might come down on us without stint or measure. He begins to turn aside a little from this truth. Just as if the prodigal, after having been a little while at his father's table, wearing the best robe, feeding on the fatted calf, had begun to wish he had, besides what his father furnished, some by-table of his own, not caring to be wholly indebted, as at the first, to his father's bounty and love. There is a tendency of this kind in us all. In various ways it manifests itself ; and hence it is that we, believers, need to be 'winning Christ' every day, and every hour of the day if we would escape this tendency. It was because Paul was always 'winning Christ' that he never deviated from the straight path.

2. The word 'winning' is the same as gaining. 'If a man should gain the whole world.' It is also used for merchants gaining by their trade ; so that the meaning of winning Christ is, gaining out of Christ the riches that are in Him, the wealth that is stored up in Him. It is an interesting fact, that in Wales and in Scotland, in the mining districts, 'winning' the coal, or the mineral, is a common expression, by which they mean, sinking a shaft deep down to get out the ore in richer abundance. Let us take that idea. Paul, on the day when he first discovered Christ, found himself to be the possessor of a large estate. He was standing, so to speak, at the opening of this mine, and he saw some of the precious ore. He could not take his eye off what he did see ; but the more he looked, the more he discovered of the inexhaustible riches there. He had only to dig down, to sink his shaft in all directions, and there was no end to what he might bring up out of this mine, and so it was his lifetime's wish, 'that I may win Christ.' When he had got some of this ore, he was inflamed with a desire to get

more. He would stand amid the heaps of his gold and say, 'That I may win Christ! This is my heart's desire, my life's end and aim.' Is it yours? Have you discovered that there are riches in Christ such as those we speak of?

An eminent preacher in other days, Dr. Conyers, began his ministry out of Christ. Christ was unknown to him, except by name. But on one occasion, in the lesson of the day, he read the words, 'The unsearchable riches of Christ.' Unsearchable riches ! These two words caught his attention during the service; and when he went home, he opened his Greek Bible, that he might see if those actually were the terms - if those English terms really expressed the original. He saw they did; that the word 'unsearchable' was a word that meant, 'that could not be searched out.' The thought arose in his heart, 'Then I have been in ignorance of Christ all my lifetime.' God made that the beginning of his inquiry after Christ; and not long after he was found pacing his room, clapping his hands for joy, and exclaiming, 'I have found Him! I have found Him!' 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin!' There you see a man winning Christ - getting at the unsearchable riches.

We have seen how Paul was eager in this matter. But let us look at it again. It is not only to win something out of Him. Paul was so highly ambitious that he says, 'I want to win Christ,' all Christ. I would fain have Him all, with all His riches. And did it ever occur to you as strange that Paul should not say, 'that I may win souls?' Many, I dare say, would have liked if Paul had said more expressly that he lived to win souls. But Paul prefers to say, 'that I may win Christ.' If a man wins Christ, and gets at His unsearchable riches, there is no question but he will discover much about himself and sin. The prophet Isaiah, when he saw the King, the Lord of Hosts, on the throne, in a moment felt self was withered into nothingness. And just as little doubt is there that a man who wins much of Christ's riches will win souls. Who has not observed, that when those who conducts meetings, and have been at the first greatly blessed, afterwards lose their power, it is almost without exception, because they have not been winning Christ? They have been giving out what they once had, just the same thing over and over again, but making no advance, getting no fresh insight into Christ and so their words fall without power. The audience, though they cannot define what the difference is, soon know that there is a difference. There never can be the same unction and power when a man is not winning Christ, bringing out fresh ore from the mine, and laying it down before the hearer. If, therefore, we would be more useful, there is no other way but this of our text. This is the shorthand method. Win Christ every day, and the Holy Ghost will bless what you tell of Him, for He delights to glorify Christ.

3. But how are we to carry on this winning? How are we to proceed in every day seeking to win Christ ? Let us invariably begin with the Person of Christ. Let us seek to be taught that most wondrous mystery - God-man. If ever we begin to think that we have seen all that we need to see in the Person of Christ, we have made a very great mistake - a mistake that will affect all our after-growth. No; through eternity we shall be exploring the person of Christ. For in that person everything that is wondrous meets. There you have the Creator and the creature in one, the finite and the Infinite, the visible the and Invisible. There you have humanity married to Divinity. A most wondrous mystery, the person of Christ, God-man! Let us always take Christ's person with us, whatever subject in connection with Him we are about to explore.

And with this before us, see what follows. I want to look at Christ's obedience for me - that obedience by which I am made righteous; for, 'by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.' (Romans 5:19.) Here is Christ obeying the law - God-man obeying it, God-man casting around that law all the lustre that the obedience of such a Person can cast around it; magnifying it, and making it honourable. And when this obedience is placed to my account, and I am accounted righteous in the Righteous One, I have wealth of obedience to present to God. I have the obedience of the God-man. Nothing, then, of my disobedience can in any way stand between me and my title to the full reward.

Then we look at His suffering - His suffering all His life long - and the completing of it in His death, when He drank the dregs of the cup, and left nothing remaining. The most awful agony, the most unspeakably great suffering that words can even hint at - all these agonies had a meaning in them that no other possibly can have. Every groan and every tear of the God-man had deep significance. There was an aged minister in Scotland, in the days of my boyhood, who on one occasion made an audience sink into perfect silence by a very simple remark. Having read out the words, 'Jesus wept,' he looked round and said ; 'You know what weeping means ?' He then looked at them again, and said, 'You know who Jesus was?' 'Jesus wept.' One tear of the God-man, what meaning it had! what power to atone! Put all that He presented to the Father, put it before you, and you have infinite satisfaction given to the law's penalty. And now you see the meaning of His being 'made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' - (2 Cor. 5:21) - 'made a curse for us, that the blessing might come upon us.' (Gal. 3:13,14.) What righteousness! what blessing! since He was the Person through whom it came to us. Are there not unsearchable riches here! No mistake can be greater than to think we have exhausted the meaning of these things, that we learned at the first. They are to be our life-study.

And so when we call to mind our union to Him. We are His members. To be a complete Christ He cannot want one of His members, so thoroughly are we one with Him. My Mediator - think who He is - all in Him is given to me. Then no wonder that I have joy. The wonder is that I am not overflowing with joy that is full of glory. No wonder I have peace; the only wonder is that I have anything else than 'peace that passeth all understanding.' All the sunshine that falls upon the vine falls upon the branches, and if I am a branch I have the Father's sunshine of love. And the sap of that vine belongs to me. All that is in Christ belongs to me. Believer, should we not wonder daily that we take so little from Him, that we win so few victories through Him! Instead of wondering that we are said to be 'more than conquerors,' we should rather say it must always be so, because we are one with Him.

One thing further. When carrying on our researches and exploring the mine, let us never forget to look at Him as He shall be revealed. We are to win Christ as He is to be revealed. Look at Him in His coming glory. We gladly take what His cross has purchased. We gladly take all that His Resurrection and Ascension bring us. We gladly look up to an Interceding Saviour. But look to a Coming Saviour, at His coming in glory as the Bridegroom - as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. What does He say to us in prospect of that day? He says, 'I am the bright and the morning Star;' and does He not at time same time say to us, 'I will give you the morning Star.' (Rev. 2:28) I will give you myself in my glory? All the glory in which I am to be manifested on that day belongs to you. What a prospect this opens up to us! For is He not called 'Our life' when He appears! - 'Christ our life shall appear, and we shall appear with Him in glory.' (Col. 3:4) The fulness of life and of glory seem to go together. Should we not then be seeking to win more in this direction?

There is no limit to the treasure we may thus win out of Christ. I was once visiting a family, who, I knew, had formerly been in a part of the country where there were mines. I said, 'How is it that you have come away from what was so long your residence?' The answer was, 'The mineral was all exhausted,' - and so they had betaken themselves to another spot, for there was nothing more to be got in that mine. Shall this ever be the case with Christ? Yet does it not seem as if some believers thought that, at any rate in some directions, they had got all that can be got? How strange the mistake to think that inexhaustible riches have been exhausted! As yet you have only begun to know a very little of Christ.

And here it is important to speak of 'searching the Scriptures.' It is in them you have eternal life set forth - they are they that testify of Jesus (John 5:39).

(a) If you are conscious of still being converted, search the Scriptures in order to find the hid treasure. This is Christ's own suggestion, for listen to His parable, Matthew 13:44. Yonder is a man, busy and diligent, head and hands full of work. He thinks of no riches but what his own ploughing, and digging, and sowing may bring. One day, however, he espies, beneath the surface something glittering - it is silver! it is gold! Here is a new way of reaching his goal! 'This is a new kind of new treasure, and let me make it my own!' A thought about Christ has been shot into his soul - thoughts of another world, and of Him who is all our salvation, and all our desire, have got entrance. He sees where true wealth lies, and how he may become rich now, by simply taking what Christ won for him.

(b) And if you are a believer, search the Scriptures, in order to find more treasure. It is in the Word He meets us; it is by the Word He reveals to us His riches. We must daily repair to the field where the treasure lies, and explore what is to be found there - what the Scriptures set forth in Old Testament and New, by word and by sign, by teaching and parable, by type and antitype, by prophecy and fulfilment, by history and by song, and by epistles. Never forget that Joshua (see chap. 1:8) was told that his prosperity in all his undertakings would depend on his 'meditating on the Law of God day and night;' and that that counsel was embodied in the first of the Songs of Israel (Psalm 1:2,3). Study the Bible; the sixty-six holy books given us by the Holy Ghost. Study every page and line of God's letter to the sons of men. Who can tell what you will win daily?

4. It is quite evident that the soul that is every day carrying on this winning will not be a backsliding soul. Assuredly, if the Holy Spirit enable you day by day to carry on this pursuit, you will be kept from backsliding. Every fresh discovery of Christ is a security against turning aside. We begin to backslide whenever we let dimness in looking to Christ come over our eyes. We let him out of sight, and we begin to draw back. If you would be vigorous in your spiritual life, win Christ; if you would be useful, win Christ; if you would be happy, win Him every day. If you would grow, win Christ. It is somewhat like astronomy. Every discovery that is made helps us on to greater discoveries. You never hear the astronomer saying, 'We may stop now in our exploration of the heavens,' when a great discovery is made. On the contrary, it impels him to go on more vigorously than ever. Let it be so with God's children.

Shall we not be continually letting unsaved men know that we have got what they might well envy? Surely if they saw us winning Christ, and finding what delighted us, and kept us ever searching further, they might be allured. If they saw that we had got a rich secret they knew nothing of, it would draw some, who fancy when

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they hear only a few common-place words about Christ, often repeated, that there is very little in Christ.

Unsaved souls, come and inquire into this matter. Begin where Paul began, at the foot of the Cross. Begin by recognising Christ as your Saviour from guilt and wrath, by seeing Christ made sin, made curse for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). Come and see this, and see it now. You have no time to lose. The missionary Judson once spoke to a Burman prince who seemed in earnest about salvation, and pressed him at once to admit the claims of Christ, the Son of God. The thoughtful prince said he would consider. It was worth considering, Judson said, 'But make up your mind : it is too important a matter only to consider.' The prince said, 'It is too great a matter to decide on all at once.' Judson asked, 'When do you mean to make up your mind?' He said something to the effect that he would speak about it again next week. Judson looked at him and replied, 'What if, in the meantime, you change worlds?'

Fellow-sinner, unsaved soul, you may have changed worlds before to-morrow. Make up your mind now to accept this Saviour, this Christ, and to spend time and eternity 'in winning Him.'