The Life That Wins

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 and every man may live that life.

I do not mean that every man may be Christlike; I mean something 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 may have power from Christ; I mean something better than power. And I do not mean that a man shall be saved from his sins and kept from sinning; I mean something better than even that victory.

To explain what I do mean I must tell you a personal 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 dishonorings of Christ, about disobedience to heavenly visions, about conscious fallings short of that which I saw other men attaining, and which I knew Christ was expecting of me. But thanks be to God's long-suffering patience and infinite love and mercy, I can 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, were definite enough. Three in particular stand out.

Fluctuations in Spiritual Life. Sometimes I would be on the heights spiritually; sometimes I would be in the depths. Sometimes before temptation, sometimes by a gradual downhill process, my best experiences would be lost, and I would find myself back on lower levels. And a lower level is a perilous place for a man who calls himself a Christian, as the devil showed me over and over again.

Besetting Sin. I was not fighting a winning fight in certain lines. I did not look for sinlessness; 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. I prayed, O, so earnestly, for deliverance, and the habitual deliverance had not come.

Lack of Spiritual Power. I was doing a lot of Christian work. I was even doing personal work – the hardest kind of all, talking with people one by one about giving themselves to our Savior. But I wasn't seeing results. I didn't see lives made over by Christ because of my work, and it seemed to me I ought to. Other men did. Why not I? I was sometimes heartsick over the spiritual barrenness of my Christian service.

A New Conception of Christ

Certain men to whom I looked up as conspicuously blessed in their Christian service seemed to have a conception or consciousness of Christ that I did not have, that was beyond, bigger,

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deeper, than any thought of Christ I had ever had. I rebelled at the suggestion that I lacked this when it first came to me. 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 Savior 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? 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 Dr. John Jowett of England preach 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."* 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.

I came to know Dr. John Douglas Adam and learned from him that what he counted his greatest spiritual asset was his unvarying consciousness of the actual presence of Jesus. Nothing bore him up so, he said, as the realization that Jesus was always with him in actual presence; and that this was 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 a conference, and Dr. Robert F. Horton was to speak on "The Resources of the Christian Life." 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 sentence showed me my mistake, while it made my heart leap with a new joy. What he said was something like this: *"The resources of the Christian life, my dear friends, are just Jesus Christ."* That was all, but that was enough. Later as I talked with Dr. Horton 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, a young Welsh minister, the Rev. Richard Roberts. 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.

A while later, while I was attending a conference, Bishop Oldham of India spoke on the topic, "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"* (John 7:38). He told how some have a little of the water of life, bringing it up in small bucketfuls and at

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intervals, like the irrigating waterwheel 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. He described a little elderly 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.

Praying It Through

The next morning, alone in my room, I asked God 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 and heard of, a conception better than any I had yet had and beyond me, I asked God to give it to me. I had Richard Roberts' sermon with me, *"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? 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 Ephesians 3:14-21, Galatians 2:20, and Philippians 1:21.

I had known that Christ was my Savior, but I had looked upon Him as an external Savior, one who did a saving work *for* me from the 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 knew something better than that. At last I realized that Jesus Christ was actually and literally within me; and even more, that He had constituted Himself my whole life (except for my resistance to Him), my body, mind, soul and spirit; my very self. Was not this better than having Him as a helper, or even than having Him as an external Savior, but to have Him, Jesus Christ, God the Son, as my own very life?

It meant that I need never ask Him to help me again 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 a part of Him. All He asked me to believe and say was, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me"* (Gal. 2:20). Jesus Christ had constituted Himself my life as a literal actual fact. For *"In Him were all things created…and in Him all things consist,"* and we are a part of the body of Christ (Col. 1:16-18).

Do you wonder that Paul could say with tingling joy and exultation, *"To me to live is Christ"*? (Phil. 1:21). He did not say, as I had mistakenly been supposing, I must say, "To me to live is to be Christlike," 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.

The Personal Knowledge

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

Do not think that I am suggesting any mistaken, unbalanced theory of perfection or sinlessness in what I have been saying. The life that is Christ reveals to a man a score of sins and failures in himself where he only saw one before. He is still left the free will to resist Christ, and my life, since the new experience of which I speak, has recorded shamefully many failures and sins of such resistance. But the fighting has been on higher levels than it ever used to be, and the restorations after failure are wonderfully blessed and complete – made so, I think, by "keeping short accounts with God."

Needs Met

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

1. There has been a sustained fellowship with God utterly different from and infinitely better than anything I had ever known in all my life before. Christ has permitted no extended, dreary fluctuations or barren intervals in my spiritual life.

2. There has been habitual victory over certain besetting sins – the old ones that used to throttle and wreck me. There is yet infinitely much ground to be occupied by Christ; of that I am more painfully aware than I ever used to be. And I know also that there is in my life, as Bishop Oldham said, "a vast area of undiscovered sin" that I have not let Him even open my eyes to. I must be ever more completely surrendered and obedient. But many of the former constant and sickening, soul-destroying failures are done away with by Him, and as I have faith to believe, forever.

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, have had their lives completely revolutionized by Christ, laying hold on Him in this new way and receiving Him unto all the fullness of God. Life fairly teems with the miracle evidences of what Christ is willing and able to do for other lives through anyone who 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. When our life is not only Christ's but Christ – our life will be a winning life, for He cannot fail. But remember, a life cannot win unless it serves. It is only a small part of life to overcome; we must bear fruit in service if we would really enter into life and the joy of the life that is Christ. If we are not bearing fruit constantly and habitually, as a life habit, we cannot ever do the lesser thing of habitual winning.

Three Conditions

The conditions of thus receiving Christ as the fullness of the life seem to be three – after, of

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course, complete confession of sin and our personal acceptance of Christ as our Savior from the guilt, power, and consequences of our sin.

1. Make absolute and unconditional surrender to Christ as Master of all that we are and all that we have.

2. Ask God for this gift of the fullness of Christ as our life.

3. Believe then, that God has done what we have asked – not *will* do, but *has* done. Upon this third step, the quiet act of faith, all may depend.

Our faith must be willing to 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.

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. Christ creates spiritual power, but Christ is better than that power. He is God's best; He is God. And we may have this best, we may have Christ, yielding to Him in such completeness and abandonment of self that it is no longer we that live, but Christ lives in us. Will you thus take Him?

– Condensed from the booklet, *"The Life That Wins"* by Charles G. Trumbull (1872-1941). Trumbull was associated with the *Sunday School Times* for many years and became its editor and director.

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