

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John 5:24.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life." I John 3:14.

Of what does Jesus speak? Of what does John speak? They do not speak of bodily and temporal death--of the death which has no music but the sob of broken hearts, no pleasure fountains but falling tears, no light but darkness. Saved and unsaved alike die--finding no exemption from this debt of nature. Jesus and John mean spiritual death--ending in eternal death, the death of soul and body, the dreadful destruction Christ taught men to fear, saying: "Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," Matthew 10:28, the death which ultimately is "going away into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"--"punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord," the endurance of "the wrath of the Lamb"--death with its sting unremoved.

"There is a death whose pang
Outlasts the fleeting breath,
Oh, what eternal terrors hang
Around the second death.
Lord God of Truth and Grace,
Teach us that death to shun,
Lest we be banished from Thy face,
And evermore undone."

Paul said, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." Colossians 2:13. This means that men, with their souls brought "into captivity to the law of sin"--evil hearts, unholy passions, depraved affections predominating--are outside of Christ's saving mercy--dead by means of sin and their sins. This fearful statement--universal in rule since Adam fell--means that sinners impenitent, hating not sin, loving not God, not acquitted in Christ, not made perfectly righteous through faith in Christ, not washed in Christ's blood, the eyes of their souls not directed toward the cross, having never come to Christ, refusing to come to Christ that they might have life, never having experienced a sense of reconciliation, their natural enmity toward God stubbornly maintained, are as dead as entombed Lazarus before the voice of Jesus summoned him. Spiritually dead, though naturally alive. Dead--without Christ, though respectable, exemplary, claiming personal worth, satisfied with outward forms of godliness, decent! Yet rejecting God's Son as Saviour--excusing themselves from accepting the Gospel invitations, their chance of salvation and heaven is as good as the lowest of the low who penitently come in filthy rags to Christ. Dead--the moral sense so perverted that all wonders of grace, all excellencies of Christ which the cross reveals, all warnings and promises of the Bible fall upon them "like sunbeams upon the eyes of the dead." Though alive physically, as dead under the sentence of the law, as dead in respect to the privileges and promotions of spiritual life, as dead in opposition to regeneration and sanctification, as dead in insensibility to spiritual and heavenly things as the dead in their graves to earthly noise. Dead from two causes--the ignorance which men inherit from the fall, and the law of sin in the members which leads to actual rebellion against God.

Unsaved men are dead to Christ and to God--no faith in Him; no response to His love; no felt need of His mercy; no recognition in their hearts of the criminality of their sins; no acknowledgment of the terrible liabilities and dangerous consequences of sin; no repentance unto eternal life; no awareness that all unforgiven sin will be accompanied with an absolutely righteous retribution; no belief that Jesus, the wisest and tenderest who ever appeared on earth, who loved and lived and died as none other, was not afraid nor ashamed to speak the truth about hell.

A man may be blind and alive, deaf and alive, dumb and alive. But if he is insensible to material things he is dead. So it is with the unrenewed soul; it meets all objects and agencies of the spiritual world with cold indifference, with utter unconcern. Though he is charged with numberless transgressions, and the wrath of God abideth on him, he is sensible of no burden. Though destruction and misery are in his ways, he is unalarmed. Though God reproves, encourages, asserts His authority, displays the reasonableness of His command, addresses man's hope and man's fear, draws back the veil that hides the eternal world and sets life and death, blessing and cursing before them, men turn away from Him that speaketh, reject the counsel of God against themselves, remaining stubbornly inflexible against all God's overtures of love and mercy.

Spiritually dead is the natural man--completely devoid of natural life. "Alive worldwards, alive selfwards, alive sinwards, but dead Godwards." Men who are alive physically understand natural things. They reason, talk, play, work, eat, drink, marry, build, plant, trade--and receive the natural benefits of such. But their souls, having no union with Christ, are in the state and power of spiritual death--there is no motion toward God and heavenly things. Though many excellencies adorn their associations with men, those excellencies are as so many flowers on a corpse. Their affections toward God are frozen. Such is the sad, deplorable deadness of the unsaved individual and the unsaved hosts.

In the second place, let us note the cause of this death. It is sin. "The wages of sin is death." Sin, in destruction extensive, makes universal abuse of Christ's Person, nature, offices, righteousness, blood, death. Sin--awful, universal, inescapable--the quintessence of all horrors, the causative element of all world suffering, throws man, woefully deranged, miserable, ungoverned, erratic, lost, into leagues of night. Sin, the most terrible fact of God's universe, life's most dreadful and inexorable curse, manifest inwardly in dis-crowned faculties and degradations of human love and brutalized spirits, is the desert breath that drinks every dew. This evil, the disease of the soul, the instrument of everlasting ruin, the midnight blackness that invests man's whole moral being, subverted the constitutional order of man's nature, dismantled him of his nobility, caused him to give unconditional surrender to diabolical power, destroyed the harmony of his powers. Sin, destructive of all happiness, has withered everything fair. Sin, darkening the understanding, searing the conscience, making the will rebellious, occasioning all tears of sorrow and all pangs of agony, has blasted everything good, made bitter everything sweet, rolled tides of tragedy far and wide--sweeping all lands with death. Sin, promising velvet and giving a shroud, promising liberty and giving slavery, promising nectar and giving gall, promising good fruit and giving the cast-out rinds of carousal, promising perfumed handkerchiefs and giving foul rags, promising silk and giving sackcloth. Sin's gold has no purchasing power. Sin's revelry is burlesque, sin's splendors faded spangles, sin's pleasures ghastly fictions. Sin, like the shirt of Nessus, burns one alive. As that poison garment ate away the muscles of the victim in his vain attempt to rid himself of it, so sin destroys the power of men--bringing death. But where is life for this death? There is only one answer--now and forever.

It is Christ Jesus. From a condition so utterly corrupt, from the death so to be dreaded, how is the lost sinner to be rescued? The diseased soul cured? The captive made free? The dead made alive? By puny articulations of human eloquence? By arts of speech? By improvements in environment? By culture? Can the influence of moral suasion affect this work? No. These things are as impotent to bring this rescue from death to life, from bondage to liberty, from rotteness to health, from the pit to the throne, from the depths of ruin untold, as is an infant's arm to chain the lightning, as is a teaspoon to stay the mad plunge of an avalanche. But in Christ is this rescue, this life, this health, this liberty.

Christ Jesus--in whom all beauty, holiness, perfection, meet--possessing manhood in its purity and Godhead in its vastness, exhausts the precious treasures of His invaluable blood to pay our debts. He only is the everlasting source of human salvation. He only

can open to mankind the fountains of grace. Through Him the law is vindicated, the holiness of God doubly honored and mercy in richest munificence proclaimed to the sinner. In Him the purpose of divine love attains full and final triumph.

Sin is debt--and divine forgiveness is God's acceptance of the crimson coin of Christ's blood as payment for the debt. Sin is a cloud: divine forgiveness is the sun which drinks it. Sin is a stain: divine forgiveness is the bath which cleanses it away. Sin is dross: divine forgiveness is the furnace which burns it out. Sin is darkness: divine forgiveness is the light which dispels it. Sin is a burden: divine forgiveness is the burial of it in the seas' depths. Sin is a poison: divine forgiveness is the antidote that eliminates it. Sin is a coral reef on which ships go down: divine forgiveness is the power that removes it. Sin is the foul miasma: divine forgiveness is the pure wind that sweeps it away. Sin is a sewer pipe: divine forgiveness is the transformation that makes it a rose garden. Sin is the blotted and blurred record: divine forgiveness is the erasure of the page from life's book.

The God of all grace poured out wrath upon the sinless Christ. Forsaken was He that our sins might be forgiven and forgotten. He received the wages of sin which He never earned that we might have eternal life which we never deserved. To the bottom of the pit went He that we might be in the bosom of the Father. He went into awful gloom that we might enter into glory. Sold was He that we might be ransomed. Bound was He that He might bestow upon us true freedom--the freedom of sons. Scourged was He that by His stripes we might be healed. Crucified was He that through His grace we might crucify the flesh. For a time He was separated from God that we might be with God through all eternity.

What will you do with this Christ in whom are all the riches of grace--whose arms are never closed against wretchedness or penitence? With Him who loved all and loved them more than Himself? With Him who went through the gates of death that the gates of death might never hold us in? With Him who lay in the grave to take its chill and darkness and horror away--and taught us how to ascend from the tomb?

For all who wish to, and will, receive the Saviour, He stands ready to bring from death to life, from shameful failure and loss into the gain of His Cross. No reluctance, but only highest willingness is on His side. What will you do with the Christ who receiveth sinful men? You can pass from death to life through Him. For the weariest day, He will be your stay. For the darkest night, He will be your light. For the weakest hour, He will be your power. For each moment's call, He will be your all. What will you do with Him who was assaulted that we might be shielded--smitten that we might be healed--lacerated that we might be liberated--slain that we might be secured--who met all the tortures of condemnation for our justification--who will change the whole world by the brightness of His coming?

Without Jesus Christ--in death there is no assurance; in trouble there is no refuge; in sorrow there is no comfort; in temptation there is no strength; in disaster there is no courage; in sin there is no grace; in perplexity there is no prompting; in darkness there is no light; in storms there is no calm. But with Jesus you have assurance of victory over sin, the world and eternal punishment.