

JESUS, THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

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SCRIPTURE: I John 5:10-15.

He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believed not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God: that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

What is live? What is living? Are you living at this moment, or are you dying? The obvious answer to that may not be the right one. As a matter of fact, you are both living and dying. As soon as life begins, the processes of death begin to work in the individual cells of the human body. As long as the processes of life work faster than the processes of death, life keeps ahead of the game and we say that we are alive. But let death work in us faster than life can repair its damage, and we die. You think you are living at this moment, and you are. But you are only partially alive; you are also slowly dying. Some day the death that is in you will catch up with you. You can postpone the day of your death by taking certain precautions to protect your health and safety, but some day your body must die. Then what? Will the real you -- your spirit -- your personality -- continue to live? And what kind of living will that be?

All life comes originally from God, through Jesus Christ, the life-giver, and God's agent in creation. "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things," said Paul in Mars Hill, "for in him we live, and move, and have our being." There is a quality of life which is peculiarly and uniquely a characteristic of Deity. This life is self-existent, immortal, eternal, indestructible. Like God it is "from everlasting to everlasting," without beginning or end. Man shared this quality of life in the beginning of creation. He knew life to the full. He had fellowship with God. He knew no death; he was potentially immortal. But then came sin, and with it the fall, and death -- spiritual death which is separation from God, and physical death which is separation of spirit and body. Man lost his first estate; he lost that immortal quality of life; he became mortal, subject to death, dying daily in the flesh even while he thought he lived. In this condition man is powerless to save himself from either spiritual or physical death. He is lost, fallen, and helpless.

Jesus came into the world that man might have life, and that he might have it more abundantly that whosoever should believe in him should not perish but have eternal life -- that the quality of life which we call immortal or eternal might be restored to fallen man. He Only, of all men who ever lived, not only had life, but was life. John says of him, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men;" and again: "The life was manifested, and we have seen it." Man may obtain for himself this true life, this immortal, eternal quality of life, only by coming into a new and vital relationship with God and Christ, who are the source of all life. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

We enter into this relationship with God and Christ by crucifying the old man with affections and lusts, and putting on the new man -- by being born again, or born from above -- by being begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead -- by receiving within ourselves the spiritual life of Jesus which makes us new creatures in him. Paul wrote to the Galatians expressing this truth as follows: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me....." The same idea is thus expressed to the Corinthians: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body;" and to the Romans: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." John characterizes Jesus as the "Bread of Life," which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world, and says that if men do not eat of this bread, there is no life in them.

Many people have a mistaken idea of what eternal life is. Some think of it merely in terms of quantity -- of untold ages or years of eternity. Eternal life is not a quantity, but a quality. The new life -- eternal life -- can begin now. Any man may have it at any time he is willing to crucify the old man and undergo the new birth which brings the life of Christ into his life. Length of years has little or nothing to do with this eternal quality of life. We may have eternal life, and live only a few years on this earth in the flesh; or we may live here for a hundred years and still never attain to an eternal or celestial quality of life.

Baptism -- the symbol of the death and burial of the old man in a watery grave and the resurrection of the new man -- prepares man for the new birth, for the quickening of the new life that is in Jesus, who "according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Baptism is for the remission of sins. It prepares the way for the life of Christ to dwell in us -- the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of Promise. When that Spirit is in us, we who were once dead in trespasses and sins know that we have passed from death unto life.

In many ways and at many times Jesus stressed the availability of eternal life now. "He that believeth on me hath (present tense) everlasting life." "He that heareth my words and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come unto condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." This new life begins when our sins are forgiven, and we are begotten and born again into the Kingdom of God. Eternal life is Christ's life. It is a quality of life, not a quantity. Eternal life cannot be destroyed by the death of the body or by the passing of the years. But on the other hand, the endless ages of eternal life are a natural and inevitable consequence of having achieved an eternal quality of life.

Although eternal life is a quality of life which may be achieved here and now, it is also a promise of a future and better and larger quantity of life. The life which we have now, even though it be from Christ, and eternal in quality, is hampered and restricted somewhat by the mortality of the body in which it dwells. The body must die; but the quality of eternal life cannot be destroyed by physical death. It continues on with the spirit. Laying down the imperfect body in death only prepares the way for life in an immortal body -- life which shall be endless -- life which shall be lived on the highest plane of which we have made ourselves capable and worthy.

This hope of a new and immortal body in which the immortal spirit can dwell eternally is likewise through Christ and the power of his resurrection. By laying down his life -- the life which could not be destroyed or taken from him -- and then taking it up again in his resurrection, Jesus broke the power of death. By the power of his resurrection, the resurrection of all men to a complete, full, unrestricted, and glorious eternal life is made possible. Jesus said, "I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." That same power is available to all whose "life is hid with Christ in God." "When Christ (who is) our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

Are you living or dying? Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."