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## Life and Death

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again. Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:14-18).

### **The Invasion of Death**

I want to try and put the meaning of that portion of Scripture into a simple, concise form of explanation. You see that its main theme is life and death. Now, the Bible teaches that death was not natural, it did not belong to the constitution of things. It was not a law which God put into man and nature, that after a certain time he and it should die. Death is not a natural law originally. It is something altogether unnatural from God's standpoint. Death was an invasion like the invasion of an enemy, and is always regarded in the Bible as an enemy which has invaded, has no right, and ought not to be. You know that, deep down in your very being, you revolt against death. There is that which says, This is wrong, death is wrong, death ought not to be! Yes, the Bible teaches that death is an invading enemy who has got in and really should not be there; he is an intruder into God's creation.

But the Bible just as definitely and fully reveals that there is such a thing as a deathless condition or state, a state out of which the very sting of death which is sin, has been rooted, extricated; a state free from death, a deathless life. In the New Testament, in our translation, it is so often called

'eternal life' - not a very complete and perfect explanation of what it is, for that phrase always conveys the idea of duration rather than kind. We come to that again. The Bible, we are saying, equally reveals a condition of deathless life which is not only continuation indefinitely but is glorious life, or a life of glory. There is no glory about death as death. You may see glory triumphing in the presence of death as in the passing of a saint triumphantly, but death itself has no glory in it. Glory is only found in deathlessness, and this deathless life of which the Bible speaks is a glorious life in its essence, in its nature; that is, it has all the power of glory and glorification in it.

There are two sides of the Bible about this matter, but we have to return for the moment to the former. God, so to speak, had to make a grave: He had to make a grave for what had been invaded by death. Graves have always signified the end of a certain order, a certain form, a certain creation. You have to say over every grave, That is the end of something and it is the end of that in which death has its root, its place, its grip. So we find that graves came in right at the beginning. Sometimes, and usually or more often, they are the graves of individuals. You have the monotonous repetition - So-and-so died and was buried; So-and-so died and was buried. But you also find very big graves into which vast multitudes were cast at one time. The flood in the days of Noah was one of God's graves. It stands as a great type and symbol of this truth, that sin works death and death must have a grave. There must be the burying of something, the putting away forever of something.

But let us remember that death does not begin with the body, death is not first of all physical. Death is first spiritual. The bodily or physical side of it is only just the final outworking so far as our being here on this earth is concerned; it is the final stage of death's working in us here. But death started long before that. It is firstly spiritual, and the nature of death is simply, but terribly, severance from God, a rupture in the Divine relationship. When that takes place, there is death. When we become *conscious* of that, we know something very, very much more terrible than physical death. Indeed, many have sought most eagerly to bring about physical death in the hope that they might quench this full consciousness of their separation from God as it has broken upon them. To become alive to the *fact*, which *fact* exists in the case of every one of us outside of Christ, to become *alive* to the fact that we are severed from God, are without God in our natural state and therefore without hope, is the meaning of death, and it is an awful thing.

Now, apart from an *intervention* of God, the whole situation is desperate and hopeless. There is nothing for it but eternal separation and somewhere becoming conscious of it, becoming conscious that that separation is a fixed thing - that is awful. A hopeless and desperate situation exists unless God intervenes. It requires God to intervene; only God can meet this situation. You know quite well that in the physical realm, with all inventions and devices, there is no power of man in existence to ultimately frustrate death. When the time for death has really come, nothing can change that. We are all compelled to bow, to surrender. It will take Almighty God in a direct intervention to change the situation and bring in hope.

### **God's Intervention**

Well, that brings us to the other side. God *has* intervened. That is the Gospel. So familiar is the word to us that it has lost its real meaning and impact and force: it is just thought to be some kind of preaching something that preachers talk about. They call it 'the Gospel', and it is a word despised by many. Ah, but originally it carried a different sense - God's Spell, God's good news, and you have to be in a desperate situation in order to appreciate good news. If we recognise how desperate the situation is, we are ready for good news. God's Gospel is this, that He has intervened in a hopeless situation. He has Himself intervened in this very matter, this desperate state of things. God has not

sent an angel, not even an archangel. He has come Himself, incarnated in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, and so has intervened in this scene and state of desperate hopelessness.

Well, now we are keeping very close to what we read, "One died for all". One stepped into the place that all were in. He, sinless, Who knew no sin, He in Whom there was no sting of death at all, which is sin; He over Whom death had no right or power whatsoever, He Who in His own right and prerogative of His very nature of sinlessness could not be touched, let alone holden, of death, He came into the scene, He Who knew no sin, was made sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21), and by His being made sin the sting of death was there, and so He suffered the death of sin in our place. He died as in our room and stead, as a sinner upon Whom were laid our transgressions, our sins. He died our death, bore judgment in our place, and the point at which He touched our state far beyond our consciousness was this, that there was given to Him in an eternal moment the awful consciousness of what death is - abandonment by God - when He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). He entered this into the full and consummate meaning of death, and to have that for a moment is to touch eternity. In that moment, He entered into the full consciousness of separation from God. We have never had that and need never have it, thank God! That is where He went instead of us.

"...That they which live..." That clearly indicates life beyond death; that clearly indicates resurrection from the dead. Postpone the physical side of that, that is in the future. The spiritual side of this is *now*, resurrection from the dead *now*. God "raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand" (Eph. 1:20). That setting means that God placed Him, positioned Him in the sense and with the meaning that here is One installed Who is an inclusive representation of many others. He is the type, the firstborn, the firstfruits, the forerunner of many others who will and can come into that blessed position of deliverance from the power of death because of deliverance from the condemnation of sin. He is installed, He is placed, He is set as the representative One, "that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes (or in their place) died and rose again". The intervention of God in Christ, the raising of Him from the dead and setting Him at His own right hand, has brought hope, eternal hope, into the place of that awful despair and hopelessness in which we are.

Dear friends, do recognise the infinite grace of God in this present time. God declares facts to us; He does not, He could not possibly, bring those facts home to us in any fulness whatsoever. If we were to have the fact of our condition outside of Christ brought fully home to us, we should disintegrate, we should go raving mad, something would happen, we should commit suicide, do something desperate, we could not bear it. In His mercy, God is not doing that. But He is saying that we *need* not know that. When He speaks of a darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:4-7, etc.), He knows what He is talking about. There is a consciousness of hopelessness, full and complete. But that is the dark side. In His mercy, He says that that is not necessary because He has intervened to save us from it, and not only to save us from that awfulness of doom and despair, of darkness and hell, but to save us unto glory, deathless life which in its full outworking is glory for spirit *and for body* - a glorified body in the power of this deathless life. He has intervened to secure for us that which was the inheritance He meant us to have at the beginning, but which was lost to us through Adam's sin, and this invasion of death. He has dealt with the whole condition, cleared it up and made possible a full realisation of all that glorious hope. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3-4). "A living hope". That is what this passage of Scripture that we have read amounts to.

But what is the practical thing between the two? There is the awful grave, and here are we, and that grave is in our path, it lies across our way; not just the grave of Mother Earth, but that awful grave, the grave which God has had to dig for a creation, the grave of that awful death, that grave which is after all spiritually only a passage through into an awakening which it is impossible to contemplate. Here we are, and in our path lies that grave, but between us and that grave stands a cross - "two arms outstretched to save, like a watchman set to guard the way from that eternal grave" - a cross on which the Prince of glory died, a cross where He, as us, suffered the consequences of sin right to their full and most awful realisation in God-forsakenness, and full consciousness of it. That cross for us - that is the Gospel.

### **The Need of a Declaration on our Part**

But the practical point for us - it is simple, so simple that so many stumble at it, do not come to it, and the great enemy who would hold in that grasp of sin and death sets himself with all his power and his cunning to keep from that act - what is it? A declaration on our part - that is all. This is the way from death to life, this is the way from that awfulness to that glory - a declaration on our part that His death was our death, the sin laid on Him was our sin, the separation from God which He experienced was our separation from God. We were there in God's thought and mind. When Christ died, we were there. He died in the place of all - that is God's declaration. In that death, our sin as the very sting of death was plucked out and destroyed. In His resurrection, sinless, no longer bearing sin, sin done away, buried forever from God's sight, in His resurrection our sins are gone. We are no longer under death because we are no longer under the penalty of sin. We stand justified in His resurrection. He lives for our justification, and in His resurrection we are accepted by God and are given by God that deathless life - "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23) we are given that deathless life and possess it, the germ of all that glory which is to be, and "though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26). Not in *this* flesh - in a glorified body I shall see God. The body of this humiliation shall be changed and made like unto the body of His glory (Phil. 3:21). Then it shall be said, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ...Thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55,57). We make a declaration on both sides, the death side and the resurrection side, and in taking that position and expressing our faith like that, we come into the place where we are no longer under condemnation but justified, no longer in death but in life, no longer in hopelessness of prospect but now in the prospect of eternal glory.

### **A Practical Expression**

In the New Testament there is seen the way by which that declaration is made practical. It is baptism. The means does not effect the result, it does not bring it about. The means does not pass us from death to life, from despair to hope, but it is God's given way of helping us to put our faith into a very practical expression. As we go into the water, we declare that we have passed through; that, on the one hand, we have recognised ourselves as in that doomed, judged, crucified, slain Son of Man. On the other hand, we see that One in the glory there for us, nay, He is there as us, and we shall be there with Him in due course. That is the declaration that this form of expression, baptism, holds. God always asks that we should put our faith into a practical expression. A practical expression does not save, but if the Lord has prescribed, there is something about it which carries a blessing, and we who have gone that way do know that it does carry a blessing. It is a glorious Gospel, changing despairing darkness to light, shame to glory, hopelessness to the most blessed prospect conceivable.