

Oneness With God in His Method and in His Power

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(We are now coming near to the end of these meditations. We have been occupied with the spiritual journey of the Christian life from the world, through its various stages, until it reaches the heart of God, each stage and phase being some further aspect of union with Christ. Having covered so much ground, we cannot, of course, go back.

Latterly we arrived at three phases of this journey: Oneness with God in His purpose, which purpose we saw to be the securing of a heavenly people on the basis of sonship, firstly, the birth of sons, secondly, the training of sons, and thirdly, the manifestation of sons. We are letting Abraham be our teacher in this whole matter.)

The two phases to which we now come are oneness with God in His method, and oneness with God in His power; and I want that we should read two fragments of Scripture, each of which touches on these two phases:

"By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son, even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a parable receive him back" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11).

We are going to put these two things together, and you will notice that they bring us to the sixth phase of this spiritual pilgrimage: the method and the power of God. The method is resurrection, and the power is the power of resurrection life, or the Holy Spirit as the power of resurrection.

When we come to this matter of resurrection we have to recognize that it is the crisis in the life of the child of God. In the case of Isaac, and in the case of every child of God, the beginning is resurrection. It is the giving of a life which has already conquered death, and that is what Isaac stands for, as a type. He was, in a parable, brought back from the dead, and the life which he lived from that day onward was a life which had triumphed over death. And so it is with every true child of God. By the resurrection of Jesus Christ, every true child of God receives a life which has conquered death, a life over which death has no power. It is called 'eternal life' in the New Testament.

Science has proved that life can only come from life and can never come from something which is dead. This is true in the spiritual life. We can only have resurrection life from where that life comes. The Lord Jesus Christ truly died and was raised again as a first one of resurrection, and, being the first one of resurrection, life can only come from Him. This is a crisis in the experience of a child of God.

To begin with, it is not a process, but a definite, precise act. It is so definite and so precise that at one moment you have not got it, and the next moment you have it. At one moment you are what God calls 'dead', and the next moment you are what He calls 'alive'. It is as definite as that.

Let us take Abraham and Isaac as an illustration.

Abraham bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar, and then he raised the knife to plunge it into Isaac. At the moment that Abraham raised the knife Isaac was dead, and the moment that the angel of the Lord got hold of Abraham's hand Isaac was alive. It was as precise as that.

I do not know why it is that the Lord is compelling me to speak so much about the beginning of the Christian life. It is not what I had thought of for a Conference of Christians, but, against my own pre-meditation, I was compelled to give that message last night, and I discovered afterward that there were a number of unsaved people in the meeting and also a number of young Christians who do not understand the meaning of the beginning of the Christian life. Now we are here again tonight. It may put a big strain upon the patience of the older Christians, but we must take nothing for granted. We must not take it for granted that everyone really understands the nature of the new birth, so we repeat, the true beginning of a true Christian life is nothing other than a resurrection from the dead. It is the receiving of a life which is called resurrection life.

The next thing is that resurrection is God's unique act. Resuscitation is not resurrection. Wonderful things are

being done in our time. We hear of people whose hearts stop beating, and then by some artificial means they are started again. People are calling that 'bringing them back to life from the dead'. Then there are people who are drowned. After some artificial application there is given what has come to be called 'the kiss of life', which means that someone breathes into their mouth and inflates their lungs again, and they come back to consciousness. Men are calling that 'raising from the dead'. But is it that? Let them stay in their condition for four days. Let the blood run cold, and then, after four days, try artificial respiration. Well, you can work at it for ever and they will not come back to life. Lazarus was dead and in the grave for four days, and Jesus refused to go near him during that time, so that no one would be able to say: 'It was resuscitation.' It had to be resurrection.

That was why God left Abraham so long before He gave him Isaac. If we had read from the fourth chapter of the Letter to the Romans we would have come to these words: "He (Abraham) considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Romans 4:19). God made the promise to Abraham that he would have a son, and then He went away and left him for years, until it was absolutely impossible for him to have a son naturally. What was God doing? He was demonstrating that this was not going to be resuscitation but resurrection, that is, life out of death.

What we are saying is that resurrection is God's act, and not man's act. It is something which only God can do, and if the beginning of the Christian life is a resurrection, then only God can do it. It is absolutely hopeless for anyone to try to be a child of God without His help. If this is true - and it is true! - how foolish for anyone to say: 'Well, I will become a Christian tomorrow', or 'Later on in my life I will consider this matter.' If God comes to us at any time and offers us this life, it is not in our power to say: 'Not today, but some other day.' We cannot fix times for God.

We must leave that there now and go on.

We pass from the crisis and the act to the process, because spiritual resurrection is not only a crisis at the beginning, but something which is carried on throughout the whole of the Christian life. The Apostle Paul put it in this way: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:10). That word 'always' spreads itself over the whole life of the Christian. After the one fundamental crisis there are many more crises on this matter. You notice that the Apostle said "Always... in the body the dying", so that the life of Jesus is operating over against something that is always in the body.

Now, it is the privilege of every child of God to know the power of His resurrection in the body. We can know it at any time when we are experiencing something of death in our mortal bodies, whether it be sickness, weakness or weariness. There can be a fresh manifestation of His divine life, and what is true for our bodies is also true for our spirit. Oh, we may feel so down in spirit today! We may be suffering from very real spiritual depression and discouragement and may feel just spiritually dead. Have any of you ever felt like that? It is a common experience even of the children of God, but let us get to the Lord at that time and do what Paul told Timothy to do: "Lay hold on the life eternal" (1 Timothy 6:12). Now Timothy needed that in two ways. He needed it physically, for he suffered from stomach trouble - what Paul called "thine oft infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). Then Timothy needed it spiritually. He was a young man and was put into considerable spiritual responsibility for the church at Ephesus, and the old, wise people said: 'Well, you know, he is so young.' Paul said: "Let no man despise thy youth" (1 Timothy 4:12) ... "Lay hold on the life eternal." Timothy needed eternal life for body and spirit.

And what is true about our bodies and our spirits is very true in the work of the Lord. How often it seems that the work to which we are called just goes dead! Death invades the people and the work, and as we look at them we could say: 'Why, it is dying. It is just going into death.' Some of us who have been in the work of God for many years know much about that, but we have seen the work of God raised as from the dead again and again, and it would seem that God just allows these experiences of death in order to show the power of His resurrection. God would not have us accept death until He accepts it.

Now I must say a little about the power of God. The method of God is always resurrection, and the power of God is always the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of resurrection.

I am going to say something of which I want everyone to take very careful notice. The greatest and most comprehensive proof of the Holy Spirit is resurrection life. We are told that the proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is this and that - you can put names to them - but the supreme proof and the most comprehensive proof of the Holy Spirit's presence is resurrection. There may be various expressions of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, but the supreme proof and expression is in resurrection. "The power of his resurrection"

comprehends all other expressions. I believe that that chapter of the Letter to the Philippians sets forth Paul's full expression of what he wanted. He did not say at the end, when he was comprehending all: 'That I may know this expression, or that expression!' or 'That I may know the expression of the gift of tongues!' or 'That I may know the expression in the gift of healing!', or any other particular expression. He said all-inclusively, at the end: "That I may know the power of his resurrection."

Paul, who himself had been used to heal the sick, had infirmities until the end of his life. That man, who knew the power of healing as working through him, said: "Trophimus I left at Miletus sick" (2 Timothy 4:20).

No, resurrection life is more than healing. You may not be healed, but you can know resurrection life, and the greatest miracle may be just how you go on through the years with a weak body. I am not saying that there is no such thing as healing, but I am saying out of the Word of God and out of my own experience that there is a greater thing than healing, and that greater thing is divine life.

This is the power of God. If you look through the Word of God, Old Testament and New Testament, you will see everywhere that the supreme manifestation of the power of God was in resurrection. The people of Israel were in a grave in Egypt. For them Egypt was the house of bondage, and the bonds were the grave-clothes wound around them. They were like Lazarus, bound in grave-clothes from head to foot. And, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is always referred to as the greatest act of God's power. When Israel went later into captivity in Babylon, Babylon was called their grave, and through the prophet God said: "I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people" (Ezekiel 37:12). And the recovery of Israel from Babylon is set forth as the second greatest demonstration of divine power in the Old Testament.

Resurrection is the supreme proof of the power of God. You do not need that I say much about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. When He was on that Cross everything was done to make sure that He was dead. After they had nailed Him, hands and feet, on to the Cross, to make sure that He was dead they thrust the spear into His heart. When He was taken down from the Cross and put into the tomb, the high priest said: 'Take a guard and make sure', so that great stone was rolled against the tomb and the official seal was put on the stone. Then they mounted a guard of soldiers. What more could be done to make sure that He was dead? Well, everything that men and devils could do - and then, over all that, it says: "This Jesus did God raise up" (Acts 2:32). What an immense thing resurrection is!

And all the potentialities of the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus are given to the child of God. We can go right on to the end because we have His life. Until the Lord says: 'It is enough: come up higher!' there is no need for any child of God to die. Death and life are in the hands of God. How many wonderful experiences we may have of this divine life! We may make a lot of other manifestations of the power of God and they may all be quite wonderful - we will never take anything from what is of the Holy Spirit - but when we have said all, the supreme thing is "the power of his resurrection". That is the birthright of the child of God and something that you and I may be knowing now and all the days of our life. "Lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called."