

THE PATHWAY OF THE CROSS

~Other Speakers G-L: Jessie Penn Lewis:

"Except a grain of wheat fall..." John 12: 24

NOW we come to the out-working of the Cross subjectively as a law of life out of death for fruit-bearing. We must be brought into a real fellowship with Christ in His death. There is an experimental knowledge of the Cross. The Spirit of God applies the death of Christ to us, and then the life-power of the resurrection. He begins at the centre, and works out to the circumference. In the pathway of fellowship with His death we learn first, the liberation of the spirit, and then find how it works out to the soul realm-that is in relation to the intellect, the emotions, the dispositions-and then how it works out to the sphere of the body.

But I must point out that although this may be the sequence of God's working He does not always work in this order. Sometimes believers begin at one of the later stages, and then have to be taken back to learn the first elements of truth. Much depends upon their environment, and the knowledge of those who help at the beginning of their Christian life. Moreover, with some the Lord cannot work very quickly. He fits His dealings to the limitation of the soul, and has all kinds of methods, and ways of working (I Corinthians 12:6). Let us not ask Him to put us all in one mould of experience.

Now turn to John 12: 24, where we read "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit". Then the Lord applied the meaning of this saying of His to the individual disciple, and set forth at the same time) a law in the spiritual realm analogous to the law of nature. He said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it: and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve Me, let him follow Me . . ." (verses 25,26). This is clearly not the same aspect of the Cross as death to sin. There is no gradual deliverance from sin, no gradual process of death to sin or deliverance from the world, or the flesh. The Spirit of God does not say "a little bit to-day", and a "little bit tomorrow", but to all sin and all workings of the flesh, as soon as you become aware of either-'drop it!' Romans 6 therefore bids you 'reckon' yourself 'dead' to sin, but John 12: 24 speaks of a gradual and progressive law of death in respect to fruitfulness. It speaks, not of parting with that which is wrong, but that which is lawful-that which we have by nature--life. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life," said Satan to Jehovah about job (job 2: 4). It is this 'life' which the Lord calls those who follow Him to lay down for His sake, and in fulfilment of the law of death for fruitfulness, i.e., the 'life' we have by nature has to go into 'death', to enable the 'life' of God in us to bring forth fruit.

In verse 25 this is clearly seen in the Greek original, for the two words rendered into English, 'life,' are not the same in the Greek. One Greek word means the lower form of life, the life of nature-that which we share in common with the animals. The other is the eternal life-the life we have from God in the new birth wherein we are made partakers of the Divine nature. The passage could be read thus: "He that loveth his (psyche--natural) life shall lose it (i.e., the fruit of it in eternity), and he that hateth his (natural) life in the world shall keep it (i.e., save it from eternal loss) unto life (zoe, eternal life)."

The Lord's children are, to a great extent, mostly concerned with the question of victory over sin, and it is necessary that they should be, but when they know the way of victory over sin, they forget that there is another and deeper phase of the Cross beyond that. It is then a question-not of sin, but of the life by which they live and act. As one has said, the life of nature has no 'carrying' power in the spiritual sphere. It has no power of fruitfulness in the spiritual realm. That is why some believers toil so much, and get so little fruit. They know victory over sin, but the life of nature is their animating power in service and in the ordinary use of their faculties, e.g., the intellect is animated by the life of nature, as well as the affections and the emotions! It need not be anything sinful in the use of the intellect, or affections, but their very 'virtues' are from the life of nature, and not from the life of God within them. The life of nature as the animating power in the believer, instead of the life of God, means powerlessness in the spiritual conflict, for a spiritual foe cannot be fought by the 'natural' man, with natural weapons. Therefore, in so far as we walk in the life of nature, to that extent we are powerless in the warfare with the powers of darkness. They are supernatural, and can only be met by spiritual power. Even though we may, up to the extent of our consciousness, have victory over known sin, we deeply need to learn the way to 'hate', or reject the life of nature, as the Lord Christ Himself poured out His sinless soul at Calvary.

"If any man serve Me, let him follow Me," said the Lord as He spoke of the spiritual law of life out of death, and the way to lay down the life of nature for the fruitful manifestation of the life of God. At Calvary He committed His spirit to God, but poured out His soul unto death-even the death of the Cross. So the Spirit of God leads us in a path where we, too, pour out our soul-life unto death, in fellowship with the Lord at Calvary. This is the meaning of God taking you in hand, and leading you through experiences where you lose all conscious life in

the senses; for example, all 'conscious' presence of God in the sense realm. In such a path it appears times as if you had lost all your 'spiritual' life, and yet you are able to say, "I am trusting God absolutely, without any emotion, without any consciousness. I am walking in bare faith".

"I have chosen you that ye should bring forth fruit" said the Lord, so in due time, when victory over sin is known, the Holy Spirit leads the soul on into a path where the natural, emotional life subsides, and, in some measure, the active, troublesome, intellectual life, loses its power of wasteful activity. He does all this in many different ways, with the one who wants to know the fullest life of fruitfulness, and who is willing to follow his Lord, as a grain of wheat falling into the ground to die!

Let us think a moment about that picture of the grain, as applied to the believer. The grain may have a beautiful coat, but it is hard. The germ of life is locked up in it. It cannot get out. Locked up in the grain, it produces nothing. The only way to make it fruitful in the production of other grains is to drop it into the dark earth, where it loses its outer shell, its beauty, and even the sunshine, and all that made 'life' beautiful, as it nestled in its place with its companions in the ear of wheat. It loses all as it becomes detached, and drops down into the earth. After a time if you take it up, you will find nothing of its polished shell, but there will be a tiny bit of life breaking out. If it is left in the ground to give its life entirely, a new life will later on press through the dark earth back into the sunlight, and become an ear of wheat that will ultimately produce fruit, thirty or sixty-fold.

The children of God so often shrink from this truth of the Gospel. They want to be 'fruitful', but they are not willing for the way to be made fruitful. They are unwilling to part with this conscious, or soul-life, in spiritual experience. Let me say, however, that there is a consciousness in the spirit which is permanent. The life of God in the spirit has no variations, but spiritual experiences in the 'soul' or 'natural' man, are affected by circumstances, and by all kinds of external things. But as the 'grain of wheat' falls into the ground to die to all external things, it not only becomes fruitful, but, in the believer the spirit rises into fuller union with God. Then when the inner spirit-life has become steadfast in God, it moves in the orbit of its path with God, like the planets moving in their orbit in the heavens. This changeless life in God (Colossians 3: 3) is never fully known until the believer parts with the activities of the soulish life of nature.

Again, notice in the grain of wheat path the law of increase in fruitfulness. In the soul-realm the believer wins others one by one—a service for God not to be despised or discounted but where it is the life of God in us able to reproduce itself, because of the pouring out into death of the soul-life, the law of increase is one grain into thirty, and each of the thirty again into thirty more. The increase is by multiplication apart from the activities of the believer. The life of God in us, set free to act through us as the life of nature is buried in death, quickens everything it touches. One of the old writers describes this life as a 'tincture'. Take for instance one drop of ink, or a drop of milk, and it will 'tincture' a glass of water; e.g., when the divine life is in the spirit, whilst the soul-life is being poured out in death, there is a divine 'tincture' through the words you speak. Then you may say but a few simple words, but they bear fruit. You may do a most ordinary thing, but your simple act leaves an eternal stamp upon the one to whom you did it. Oh, thus to live that everything we say or do has the 'tincture' of the life of God in it. That is infinitely more valuable to God and man, and more fruitful for the believer, than the most wonderful 'sense' experience, which ends in nothing but the believer's own joy. It makes the 'ordinary' everyday life full of God. It is so simple that the one who knows it is so occupied with being "faithful in that which is least", that he does not think whether he is 'used' or not. Such a one does not clamour for 'power' or for 'more power', for he has only to see to the 'dying', i.e., the abiding in the death of Christ, whilst unknown to him the life of God in him is 'tincturing' all the 'doing', and bringing forth fruit eternal.

"Bringeth forth much fruit!" Silently, unobtrusively, the grain of wheat life works in the world of men—just in the way that God always works. He does not make any noise over what He does, and does not blow a trumpet telling of what He has done, or will do. You ask Him to do something in prayer, but He does not send a message announcing that He is going to do it! It just 'happens' as it were, and the world knows nothing about it. Oh the beauty of God's wondrous silent working! Men so like a noise, and a flourish of trumpets. But think of God's weak children in the world as grains of wheat, producing other God-like souls, and affecting the whole world without a noise, just being what they are, and walking with God, with the tincture of God touching everything. Is not this picture more worthy of God, because so opposite to man's way, than something spectacular? There is always some danger about the 'wonderful' in believers, because it is liable to be attached to the person. It is so much better that we look 'ordinary', even spiritually, and very insignificant in our lack of visible 'power', whilst God does His silent working through us in grain of wheat fruitfulness, and no glory will ever be attached to us, and our personality called 'wonderful'!

See now where the affections come into this question of the life laid down. It is easier to part with everything than life. "He that loveth his life shall lose it"! That means to say, you will get nothing for eternity out of it. You

may have victory over sin already, and be happy. That is all right; but he that "loveth his life"-even though he parts with sin-has not got reproducing power, the power to reach others, and draw them to the life of heaven. He is clinging to the life that cannot multiply and bring forth fruit for eternity. That is the secret of the lack of multiplying power in the churches everywhere. They cling to the 'life'-the soul-life with all its personal desires, and personal hope of gain-that cannot multiply.

What then shall we do as we see this? We are responsible beings. We have a choice. God works on our choices. Say "I choose it. I trust Him to do it". It is very simple. "I choose to surrender my own life to have the other!" Then you will "keep it to life eternal". Make this transaction with God, and then do not flinch or turn back from it, as He leads you on in the way He alone can do. But there is more in it than only the choice of the will. We must go back to Calvary.

Let me turn you again to Romans 6 and in verse 5 You will get the same truth in another form, and more clearly showing how this exchange of life takes place at Calvary. In John 12: 24 the Lord was speaking primarily of Himself, but the same law is for Christ and for His members. Let us read Romans 6: 5, "If we have been grafted into the likeness of His death"Conybeare's footnote says, "Literally, have become partakers of a vital union [as that of a graft with the tree into which it is grafted]".

Here again we find the secret of this grain of wheat life, definitely in connection with the believer's union with Christ in His death. "We have been grafted." Who does the 'grafting'? We cannot do it ourselves. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to be grafted into the death of Christ.

What does the gardener do in his work of grafting? He cuts the bark of the stock, and slips the graft into its place in the cut bark, binds it up, and leaves the bands there for some time. When he removes them, what has happened? Tree and graft have become united into one life. That is exactly what the Holy Spirit has to do for us. We must be grafted into Christ in His death, so that we may live by His life-His Own Risen Life, which He obtained out of death. We must become partakers of a vital union, whereby His life becomes ours, as we lay down the life of nature.

You have another similar figure in Romans 6: 17. "If some of the branches were broken off, and thou being a wild olive stock, wast grafted in amongst them, and made to share the root and richness of the olive," Paul wrote to the Gentile believers, "Thou wast cut out from that which by nature was the wild olive, and wast grafted against nature into the fruitful olive" (verse 24). This is so true of the believer spiritually. We are grafted into Christ against nature-i.e., our own nature-so that we may share His Risen life, and live a life on earth which is also 'against nature'. We are called to live a life on earth that the old I nature' is incapable of living, and we do it by being grafted into Christ, so vitally, that we are made to 'share the root and the richness' which is ours in Him.

Now let me emphasize the fact that the being grafted into the death of Christ is not a theory. It does not mean that the believer lives by the life of nature, and calls it 'resurrection life'. There are those who are compelled by utter weakness to prove the reality of a true impartation of the life of God. When your very physical life hangs upon your knowing the reality of all this in God, then you know that God is a living God. If the Word of God were not true, and the resurrection power of Christ not a reality, you would not be alive. This is what it means to some to live 'against nature', drawing upon the richness of the 'olive'-the Living Christ.

Briefly, let us now see how this law of life out of death penetrated Paul's experience and his writings. If you will ponder over his epistles in this light you will know the inner life of Paul, and understand the meaning of all that he said and did, because you yourself know something of the life which wrought in him. The life of Paul is marvellous, and is possible to every believer who learns its secret. Would to God that out of this Conference God would send some Pauls to labour as he laboured, with an utter recklessness of life. 'Grafted' into the death of Christ, in very truth, he laid down his life for the brethren. This is within the reach of everyone of us. It matters not whether we be old or young, educated or uneducated. It matters not whether we have had a college training or no training, this life out of death can be wrought into us and lived out by us, and we can be fruitful for God wherever we are. No one will quarrel with such a one, because the life is the testimony. Men do not quarrel with the life of Christ lived in and through us in selfless sacrifice. But it needs opened eyes to see how this life can only come to us in and through the death on Calvary; to see life out of death as the law of the universe; the law inwrought as the basic principle of the universe-the law of vicarious sacrifice.

Let us read one of Paul's remarkable pictures of the grain of wheat life, as given in 2 Corinthians 4: 7-11: "This treasure is lodged in a body of fragile clay, that so the surpassing might, which accomplishes the work, should be God's and not my own. I am hard pressed, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not despairing; persecuted, yet

not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed. In my body I bear about continually the dying of Jesus, that in my body the life also of Jesus might be shown forth. . . ." Is not this quite plain? Grafted into the death of Jesus, the believer is daily 'given over to death' that the life of Jesus might be manifested. One of the effects of this 'death' is, that we lose a certain exterior 'hardness' which most of us have by nature, as if the clay of the earthen vessel acted as a veil of the true life within. Too often others meet the 'clay' exterior, and not the life of Jesus within. But as the 'grain of wheat' shell is broken away, there comes about a simplicity of manner and absence of reserve, which enables the inner life to shine forth and draws others to come to you without fear. Oh how the poor world, and the lonely souls in the church, miss that 'tincture' of God through His children. There is a barrier, they say, between employer and employed, but there is also a barrier between the Christians and the unsaved, which ought not to be. The persons they want to win they cannot, because of this external 'reserve' and shell. They want to shake hands cordially, but they do not know how to do it. Oh that we may be so grafted into the death of Jesus that the very life of Jesus, in His heart-love for souls, can be manifested in us and through us-a heart for all the souls you meet, even the people you do business with every day. A heart which will not allow you to 'drive' and 'push' them, or ignore their troubles, because you are so concerned with your own.

Is it not wonderful that the Christ of Calvary came and first lived the life He wants us to live? "Christ Jesus being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God," yet He stripped Himself of His glory, and "took upon him the form of a slave, being changed into the likeness of man". He came and lived it first, and then through His death, and our death with Him, He desires to live it all out again in us, saying of the poor dark world of men, "Through My children they will understand Me, for there is the same spirit in them as there was in Me". We can see now why Paul was able to say, "I rejoice in the afflictions which I bear for your sake, and I fill up what yet is lacking of the sufferings of Christ ... on behalf of the church" (Colossians 1: 24), and again in Philippians 2: 17-18, "Though my blood be poured forth upon the ministration of your faith, I rejoice for myself, and with you all, and do ye likewise rejoice, both for yourselves and with me". Do you 'rejoice' when others are poured out for you for Christ's sake? Oh no, you say, I am willing to be spent, but I do not want anyone to be spent for me! Ah, but it takes much grace for some independent characters to allow anyone to be 'spent out' for them! But Paul said, "Though my blood is poured forth, I rejoice . . . and do ye likewise rejoice".

Neither Paul, nor others, must be robbed of their fruit, when they desire to lay down their lives for others. How it pains when those in need are unwilling to have anything done for them. Take heed lest there be 'self' even in this. Christ, for the joy set before Him endured the Cross. There is a joy in sacrifice for others that is divine. "My joy I give unto you!" 'Joy' on the eve of Calvary! This is the experimental path. Shall we follow it? You say, Yes? Then, let the Holy Spirit manage you, and your circumstances, and carry it out in His own way.

Let me, as I close, just give a word of personal experience. I was quite a babe in the consecrated life when God began to teach me these things. I remember once I was utterly sick with the joy of being used by Him to win one soul. The joy was so great that I said, "Oh Lord, I really cannot bear it"! He said so softly in reply, "How could you bear to be used to win five hundred?" And then He said, "Will you part with all that keen 'joy' which exhausts you, and just let me have you and use you to others with nothing for yourself?" I saw the wisdom of this, and said, Yes, Lord, and then found that I could go through marvellous scenes of blessing to others, which once would have quite overwhelmed me with 'joy', without any exhaustion of my fragile frame! The secret of a fruitful life is, in brief, to pour out to others and want nothing for yourself; to leave yourself utterly in the hands of God, and not care what happens to you. I owe also a good deal to the books of Madame Guyon, and the way she showed the path to the life in God. The first time I read her life it deeply moved me. I was at the vicarage at Richmond (Surrey) in Mrs. Evan Hopkins' room. I was quite a young Christian. I had never heard of Madame Guyon, but in that room I picked up her Life, and asked if I might have it to read. I was just at the height of a glorious experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The glory of the Lord's conscious presence with me was so unspeakably sweet that it was most difficult to bring the mind to the ordinary affairs of life. But as I read the book, I clearly saw the way of the Cross, and all that it would mean. At first I flung the book away, and said, No! I will not go that path, I shall lose my 'glory' experience.

But the next day I picked it up again, and the Lord whispered so gently, "If you want deep life and unbroken communion with God, this is the way". I thought, Shall I? No! And again I put the book away. The third day I again picked it up. Once more the Lord spoke "If you want fruit, this is the path! I will not take the conscious joylife from you, you may keep it if you like; but it is either that for yourself, or this and fruit. Which will you have?" And then, by His grace, I said "I choose the path of death for fruitfulness", and every bit of conscious experience closed. I walked for a time in such complete darkness-what Guyon describes as the 'darkness' of faith that it seemed as if God did not exist. Again by His grace I said "Yes, I have only got what I agreed to", and on I went. I did not know what the outcome of this would be until I went to take some meetings, and then I saw the 'fruit'. It was just as if the people had been soaked in a life tide from heaven! It was not a case of individual

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blessing-the people were all submerged in a flood-tide of life from God which quickened them, released them, and brought them out into a new life. I did not need to speak personally to them. There seemed nothing to do, but to give the message as God gave it to me, and the Holy Ghost did the rest. From that hour I understood, and knew intelligently, that it was 'dying' and not 'doing', that produced spiritual fruit. May God open our eyes to see the path, and to consent to follow Christ in His call to go with Him into the earth to die and thus bring forth fruit that shall remain for eternity.