

BLOOD, BREAD AND FIRE

The Christian's Threefold Experience

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?"

IN the book of James we are asked, "**What is your life?**" (4:14). In Philippians 1:21, Paul says, "**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**"

In all seriousness, I would ask you, "**What is your life?**" You and I have been privileged to have a part in this adventure called living. What is it all about? What is the meaning of our existence? What is the true estimate of life?

There are those today who say that we came from nowhere and are going nowhere, who agree that life is but "a tale told by a fool, full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing." Life has been called "the predicament that precedes death," "a brief and discreditable episode on one of the minor planets." But there have always been those who, because they live in a cellar, never see the mountain peaks; who, being deaf and blind, hear no music and see no meaning in our existence.

Then we have the university upstart who has been "on a four-year loaf and come home college bred," who "sees the price of everything and the value of nothing," with whom the human race is composed only of "small, crawling masses of impure carbohydrates, headed for oblivion." When these sophisticates speak lightly of God, one is reminded that in a wheat field the heavy heads of wheat bend over and the empty one stands up straight; and when we see a head, young or old, that refuses to bow in His Presence, we reflect that it must be one of the empty ones that stands up straight.

But most of us are in our right minds; we do not believe that this universe is but a concourse of eighty-odd chemical elements, the joke of a meaningless fate. We believe that "life is real, life is earnest, and the grave is not the goal."

Paul said, "**For to me to live is Christ.**" For you to live is — what?

There are three false estimates of life. Sometimes I call them, "The Three T's."

I. First, there is things.

There are those who live for things, but that is a mistake, for **“a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth”** (Luke 12:15).

The leading business in America is the junk business. We do not call it junk today; it is cars and clothes and finery and furnishings; but tomorrow it is rusty or moth-eaten, for men still lay up their treasures on earth where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal.

I heard William Jennings Bryan say: “Those who live for money spend the first half of their lives getting all they can from everybody else and the last half trying to keep everybody else from getting what they have got away from them, and they find no pleasure in either half.” I have heard that someone asked Mr. Rockefeller, “How much money does it take to satisfy a man?” He answered, “Just a little more.” As small a thing as a penny will shut out from our vision as large a thing as the sun, and so does as small a thing as money shut out God.

I have read of a man who was found dead in a desert. He had strapped around him precious stones worth thousands of dollars, but he died for lack of plain drinking water — something absolutely free. So do men die with plenty around them, plenty of this world’s goods strapped to them, but they die spiritually for want of the water of life, which is given freely without money and without price. Such is the tragedy of those who lay up treasure for themselves but are not rich toward God.

Paul speaks of **“having nothing, yet possessing all things.”** It is the Christian’s paradox. **“All things are yours,”** says the Word to the believers; all things except yourself: **“Ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”** We are not our own; we are bought with a price.

So we are not to live for things, but if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all needed things will be added. What we eat and drink and wear, the world makes these things a business; with the Christian they are only by-products. In these days when men spend their health looking for wealth and then spend their wealth looking for health, we need to remember John’s word to Gaius: **“I wish in all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth.”**

God wants no man to be richer than his soul. Therefore, things are not life’s true estimate, for we are to look to the unseen, not the seen; for things seen are temporal, but the things not seen are eternal.

II. Then there are those whose estimate of life is found in thrills.

But God’s Word says, **“She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth”** (I Timothy 5:6). Since that is true, then there certainly are a lot of animated corpses running around nowadays!

A man, alighting from a merry-go-round, was met by his wife with this accusation: “Now, look at you; you spent your money, you got off right where you got on, and you ain’t been nowhere!”

It is a good description of modern living, a senseless whirl, which has been spelled in three words—Hurry, Worry, Bury.

Millions live for pleasure and never have it because they make it a business, whereas it is a by-product. The most miserable poor mortals on earth are those who scurry around in automobiles looking for a good time and never find it, who argue that “variety is the spice of life” and don’t have sense enough to know that we can’t live on spice. These thrill-chasers speak of the gospel as an opiate, something for children and old people. Imagine such ice cream soda characters with ukulele souls trying to keep step with Paul and Savonarola and Wesley and Moody! Such poor, deluded pleasure-hunters know nothing of the real thrills of following Christ.

Why should we frequent the lunch counters of earthly pleasure when we have standing invitations to the banquet of the grace of God? There are two kinds of pleasure: **“She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth”** and **“At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore”** (Psalm 16: 11). Seek the thrills that God gives, **“joy unspeakable and full of glory.”** **“The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”** (Proverbs 10: 22). There is no morning-after taste to the joy of the Lord!

III. Again there are those who would estimate life in terms of theories.

“The world by wisdom knew not God” (I Corinthians 1: 21). Josh Billings used to say, “I’d rather know a few things for certain than be sure of a lot of things that ain’t so.” We try to go head first when God’s way is heart first. We cannot educate ourselves into life’s true estimate, for while education may change the size, it doesn’t change the sort.

A phrenologist was giving an exhibition, calling various members of his audience to the platform, feeling the bumps on their heads, then describing them to the listeners.

He called forward one man who had been a man of evil reputation in days past but who had been saved by the grace of God and had for years lived a consistent Christian life. The phrenologist, knowing only his way of sizing up the man, proceeded after his examination to describe to the audience the man as he used to be, but everybody smiled because they knew the description no longer held true.

Finally, the man himself stood and said, “Professor, you are telling them the kind of man I used to be. Since then, the Lord Jesus Christ has come into my life and now, if you size me up correctly, you’ll have to come from my head down to my heart, for the Lord lives there.”

Men try to find their way through the puzzle of life with the candle of reason and do not realize that God has kept these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes. Men hunt through libraries for truth while perhaps the janitor sweeping the steps has found it long since in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes I am much amused reading modern “Open Sesames” to health, wealth, and happiness, the latest isms and fads, treatises on the subconscious that read as though they were written by someone who was unconscious when he wrote them! Of course there is some truth in all of it: we have an old clock at home that won’t run, and it is right two times every day!

A doctor friend of mine gave me a book composed of the statements of faith, or rather of the lack of faith, of many prominent writers. I read it awhile and was growing rather weary of it when the radio began to broadcast from somewhere those precious lines of that great hymn:

Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me.

I threw down the book and said, “Thank God, I don’t have to read such guesswork. **‘I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day’**” (II Timothy 1:12).

“If any man will do his will, he shall know the doctrine” (John 7: 17).

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8: 32).

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (I John 3: 14).

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8: 28).

“We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

If life’s true valuation is not to be found in things, thrills, and theories, then where shall we look?

The other way is the way of truth. Our Lord, on trial before Pilate, said, **“My kingdom is not of this world [that is, it is not a kingdom of things, thrills, and theories]: . . . To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice”** (John 18: 36- 37).

Pilate asked wearily, **“What is truth?”**

Men still are asking, **“What is truth?”** but truth is a Whom; Christ is the truth, not merely a truth-teller, and when Paul said, **“For me to live is Christ,”** he was giving us life’s true estimate. It is not to live for Christ or like Christ, mind you, but to live is Christ.

Christ was everything to Paul.

He was the source of Paul’s life: **“I give unto them eternal life.”**

He was the sustenance of Paul’s life: **“To live is Christ.”**

Paul had no plans, ambitions, purposes of his own. He was not merely trying to live like Christ. Christ was living His life in Paul. And that is life; not that we merely make Christ our ideal, but that He through regeneration enters our broken lives to live His life in us.

It is not His purpose to improve or reform us but to have full control over our yielded wills, to increase while we decrease. It is not inspiration or imitation but identification: **“To live is Christ.”**

It has been pointed out that here we also have the true estimate of death: **“To die is gain.”**

We must first say, **“To live is Christ,”** before we can say, **“To die is gain.”** We cannot say, “To live is money and to die is gain.” It fits nothing but Paul’s statement. We must have his estimate of life to have his estimate of death. And when we do, even death becomes a paying proposition:

“To depart and be with Christ is far better.”

What is your life? Are you forever blowing bubbles, looking for ships that never come in, chasing pots of gold at the end of vanishing rainbows? Have you read many books and found them a weariness of the flesh? Have you built your castles and had them tumble about your ears in ruins? You never can find life until you find it in Christ, for He is THE LIFE.

A little girl had torn up a map of the United States and was trying to put it back together. But Maine would be right beside Montana and Indiana beside Oregon, and she was almost ready to give up when she remembered that on the reverse side of the map there was a picture of George Washington. She did know what he looked like, so when she had assembled that side, she had the other also.

Life without Christ is a hopeless jigsaw puzzle. But when we know Him and see His face, all else fits together, for **“by Him all things consist.”** **“To live is Christ.”** **“What is your life?”**

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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