

## THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

by

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### SERMON THIRTEEN -

#### ETERNAL LIFE

**"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36.**

CHRISTIANITY IS LIFE. Every man ought to have a creed, for a creed is the definite expression of one's belief. A man who believes nothing is nothing, for as he thinketh so is he. Character is made by creed. But the mere holding of a creed is not eternal life. A creed is like the basket that holds the fruit. If we eat the fruit we shall be benefited, but we should not try to eat the basket. Receive into your heart the truth that is in your creed, but do not be satisfied with the mere external statement of the truth.

Every church has two classes of members; one may be compared to trees, the other to posts. The tree grows and bears leaf, flower, and fruit. The post rots.

The Church member that has the life of GOD in him is **"a tree planted by the rivers of water, his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."** A church member that has not the life of GOD is a post that begins to decay the very day after he has been planted in the church, and the pastor is pained by having to watch the process of decay week after week.

It is a life that appropriates. The life in the tree appropriates the sunlight, heat, and moisture. The life in the soul appropriates the light of GOD's truth, the warmth of His love, and the sustenance of His grace.

It is the nature of life also to expel. Abundant life throws off the germs of disease. People who are vigorous in body can live in malarious districts without shaking with chills, while the weak in body become ill. If we are filled with the life of GOD it will throw off the disease of sin, and we can move amid the malarious atmosphere of earth without contracting its diseases.

Life moves. JESUS went about doing good, and if we have in us His life, we too will go about doing good. If we are not moved in that direction, it is good proof that we have no spiritual life. Dormant life is not sufficient.

Life asleep resembles death, and for all practical purposes a cemetery is as good as a dormitory. A church asleep is as useless as a dead church. A Christian asleep is a standing reproach to Christianity. He had better be dead, provided he died while he was wide awake in his spiritual life, for being dead he will continue to speak for the glory of GOD, but if he remains alive and

asleep, he will continue to speak against the cause of CHRIST.

A French dramatist read his latest production to a circle of critics, and while he was reading one of the critics fell asleep. The reader stopped long enough to say, "How can you criticize my production, and you sound asleep?"

"I submit," said the critic, rubbing his eyes, "that sleep is a criticism."

And so it is. If Christianity means anything, it means everything, and a sleeping Christian is a perpetual argument against Christianity. When you talk to sleeping Christians, they sometimes talk in their sleep, walk in their sleep, and fight in their sleep. One half of our church quarrels is the result of spiritual somnambulism, pastor and people fighting in their sleep.

If they were wide awake, they would be at the work of soul winning rather than contending with each other.

EVERLASTING LIFE IS A PRESENT POSSESSION. "**He that believeth on the Son, HATH everlasting life.**" Not will have, but he has it now. Whatever is meant by eternal life is a present possession. Eternal life is not therefore mere immortality; it is not simply continuity of existence. In the 17th chapter of John and 3rd verse JESUS gives us a clear definition of it: "**This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom thou hast sent.**"

Eternal life is knowing GOD through JESUS CHRIST.

Eternal death, therefore, is not knowing GOD through JESUS CHRIST.

A man may exist in this world without knowing GOD, and he may continue to exist in the world to come without knowing GOD.

Some people believe that eternal death is annihilation. They fall into that error because they have assumed that eternal life is simply eternal existence, whereas according to this definition of JESUS eternal life is knowing GOD, and therefore the opposite of it must be eternal death, which is ignorance of GOD.

I can imagine a piece of steel existing a million years, but it will be just as dead then as it is now. A corpse exists: people who are dead in sins exist: and the death of the body will not hinder its existence.

ETERNAL LIFE IS RECEIVED THROUGH BELIEVING ON THE SON OF GOD. "**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.**"

It is not believing about the Son. One may believe a hundred things about CHRIST without believing on CHRIST. He may believe that there was such a historic character, that the record of Him in the Bible is true, without depending on CHRIST for his salvation.

I believe many things about Gladstone, Disraeli and Abraham Lincoln, but I am not conscious

just now of depending on them for anything. I can believe a score of things about the steamship Olympic, her length, her breadth, her tonnage, the number of engines and boilers, the material out of which she is made. That is one thing, but when I get on board the Olympic for a trip to America, that is quite another thing.

In the first case I am believing things about the Olympic, in the second case I have committed myself to the Olympic for a voyage. Believing about CHRIST is one thing, committing yourself to CHRIST for the voyage to Heaven is another thing. The little word ON is the link that binds us to the Son of GOD for salvation. To believe ON Him is to know GOD, and that knowledge is eternal life.

The second part of our text contains

A DISAGREEABLE AND THEREFORE A NEGLECTED TRUTH. "**He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.**"

The word "**believeth**" here is not the same as the word "**believeth**" in the previous sentence. It has in it the root of the English word apathy. It means, therefore, he that makes himself apathetic, hardens himself against the Son of GOD, shall not see life.

**My friend, are you conscious of that mental process? As JESUS CHRIST is presented to you, and your conscience is quickened, do you resist the drawings of the Spirit toward Him?**

If so, you are in fearful danger. You are among those who make themselves hard against the Son of GOD, and the decree is that you shall not see life. This hardening process may continue until all avenues of approach are cut off, and you are given up to hardness of heart.

Not to believe on the Son of GOD is to turn from the light into the darkness, to refuse life and accept death. On such a person "**the wrath of God abideth.**"

"**The wrath of God**" is a terrible expression, and it remains terrible, after we have modified it by every thought which has been revealed concerning GOD.

- It is the wrath of the Lamb, and a more terrific wrath was never known.
- It is the wrath of virtue against vice,
- It is the wrath of chastity against unchastity,
- It is the wrath of meekness against brutality,
- It is the wrath of gentleness against cruelty,
- It is the wrath of righteousness against sin,
- It is the wrath of love against hatred.

All who refuse the life of GOD must suffer the wrath of GOD, and eternal death is that state of the future in which the wrath of GOD abideth.

"**He that believeth not is condemned already**"; judgment has gone against him, he is now under the wrath of GOD, and death will not remove that wrath. GOD has made life possible by

revealing Himself in CHRIST. The way of life by faith in CHRIST is so plain that a little child can understand it. There is no good reason for refusing, but when a man does refuse, all that GOD can do is to let the judgment abide upon him.

The son of a Presbyterian preacher in America was arrested, charged with treason because he belonged to the "ku-klux clan." He was tried, convicted, and sent to the States Prison. His aged father, eminent for his learning and Christian character, circulated a petition and secured hundreds of signatures, urging President Grant to pardon the boy for the sake of his parents.

The father took the petition to Washington, presented it to President Grant, who gave the pardon.

The old man received it and hastened to the train. On his arrival at the prison he was shown by the Warden into the cell where his boy was imprisoned. Standing with his hand upon the grated door he said, "John, I have good news. I have a pardon from President Grant, and you can now go home with me and see your mother before she dies," But the son made no response.

"Do you understand me, John?" the father continued, "Here's a pardon for you."

"I am sorry, father," said the ungrateful boy, "to give you pain, but I cannot accept it. I have decided not to be brought under obligation to this political administration, and I will serve out my time."

The old man's father-heart was almost broken; he fell against the grating, and would have sunk upon the floor if he had not been caught by the friendly hand of the Warden, who carried him to a cot, where he lay half unconscious for a while. When he came to himself he rose, and staggered again to the grated door with the pardon nervously clutched between his fingers, and with tears in his voice and eyes he continued to plead with his son to go home with him, but the son persisted in refusing, and the father had to return without him. Now what did President Grant do? Did he order the officials to drive that man out of his cell, in spite of his refusal to accept the pardon? He acted more wisely.

He simply let the sentence of the court abide; the man remained under condemnation. I come to you from the High Court of Heaven with a pardon written in the Blood of CHRIST, and standing before the grated door of your sin I offer you liberty in the name of JESUS.

Will you receive it, or will you reject it? If you receive it, you are free; if you reject it, the wrath of GOD abides. GOD cannot do otherwise than let the sentence of justice remain.

One of the saddest pictures in history is given us in the account of the destruction of the Bastille in Paris. That old prison had become so infamous in the estimation of the people that they decided to raze it to the ground. "Down with the Bastille," was the cry of the multitude, and against it they went with all manner of implements. Finally the door was broken open, and the prisoners were released.

In a dark inner cell was found a man who had been there 40 years. When it was announced to him that he was free, he refused to accept his liberty. He had begun to regard that dark cell as his home, and he stood in the door to fight away those who would take him into the bright sunlight and fresh air. He resisted them with the ferocity of a tiger. So it is with some who are in the dark

cell of their own guilt.

It is made possible for them to be saved; liberty is offered through CHRIST, but they stand in the door of their cell and fight against every effort to release them. GOD yearns to save them from its darkness and thralldom, but if they will not be saved, He can only let them remain in the condition they have chosen.

Let us glance once more from the dark picture of the last part of the text, to the bright picture of the first part. "**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.**" This life means liberty, it means joy, it means character. "Believe on the Son, I beseech you, and live."

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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