

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## The Great Salvation: Quickening

This century has seen man reach the moon and beyond. It has also seen the splitting of the atom, the heart transplant, test tube babies and now cloning. However, in spite of these remarkable achievements, one thing we cannot do is to create life. We can save lives and even prolong existence, but life itself remains the one great mystery. Life in all its beauty and power continues to amaze us. Whether it is the wildebeest which from birth can run fast enough to keep up with its mother, or the human baby which is so dependent for so long upon its parents, and yet has the energy to sustain movements which would exhaust an Olympic athlete.

As Christians, we believe God alone gives life. This is true, first of all, in the physical sense. He created the human race. He "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). He also made man in His own image to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Not only did He give life but blessed it. "God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). Sadly, man has not only mis-managed his own life but also the creation which God placed under man's control. Today we see the effects of this failure on a personal, national and universal scale. Greed, corruption, violence and all kinds of evil have left their dreadful effects upon the human heart, society and creation.

Man's life, unlike that of animals, is not only physical but spiritual. This is shown by the intimacy of God in the creation of man. Animals were simply given life. But man was formed by God, his life was breathed into him by God, and man became "a living soul". Man was given life and the spiritual capacity to have fellowship with God.

The opposite of life is, of course, death. Romans 5:12 teaches us that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned". Physical death is attributed to sin. Man was created for fellowship with God. The story of the Garden of Eden describes a little of that relationship. When man disobeyed God, sin entered into creation. God warned Adam that if he disobeyed His word "he would surely die" (Genesis 2:17). When the devil in the form of a serpent deceived Eve he said, "You shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Neither Adam nor Eve died physically at the moment of disobedience but lived for many years afterwards. But spiritual death took place immediately. Their relationship with God was broken. They were separated from God and unable to restore the relationship they had had. In the words of the New Testament in Ephesians 2:1, they were "dead in trespasses and sins". The judgement of physical death was also passed, so eventually human life on earth ends. The time lapse is irrelevant. In the past, in courts of law a judge passed the sentence of death upon convicted murderers. Execution took place sometime later.

Death has reigned ever since. Romans 5:17 explains that, "by one man's offence death reigned". God gave physical and spiritual life to man. Spiritual and physical death were caused by man's disobedience to God. This can be described as man's fall.

The work of Christ in death and resurrection has addressed all the problems which were caused by the fall.

- We were guilty - through Christ we have forgiveness;
- We were condemned - through Christ we have justification;
- We were in bondage - through Christ we have redemption;
- We were alienated from God - through Christ we have reconciliation;
- We were in danger - through Christ we have salvation;
- We were unholy - through Christ we have sanctification;
- We were corrupt - through Christ we have new birth; and,
- We were spiritually dead - through Christ we are made alive;

The whole of Romans 5:17 reads, "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." Adam brought death into creation. Christ has brought in life.

It is this subject of life - being alive to God - that I want to consider in more detail. A key passage is Ephesians 2:1-10. It begins with such a positive statement, "And you hath He quickened". The word "quicken" means "to make alive". In this verse we see that it is God who does the work. He makes us alive. Just as God gave life to the first man, so He is the one who gives life to the Christian. Before we look at this life more closely, we have to consider the state we were in before we knew Christ. This is important for two reasons. One, it helps us to understand the danger we were in. Two, it helps us to appreciate the greatness of God's mercy, love and grace. We shall look at this passage in three ways.

- Dead because of the devil and disobedience (verses 1-3)
- Alive because of God's mercy, love and grace (verses 4-8a)
- Living faith, living works and living worship (verses 8b-10)

### **Dead because of the devil and disobedience (verses 1-3)**

Paul describes our state without Christ in the following ways. First as being dead to God: "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). This describes a spiritual condition. We are physically alive but spiritually dead. If we are dead, we cannot respond. A dead man cannot talk, cannot feel things, has no appetite, and cannot act. In the same way Paul is saying that, when we are spiritually dead through sin, we cannot respond to God. Naturally man does not pray, does not respond to the greatness of God in creation, does not want to know God's will or act upon it in his life. Instead, man's pursuit of pleasure, entertainment, wealth and power has absorbed his life.

Secondly, we read in verse 2 that the devil is given the title of the "prince of the power of the air". This is an apt description of one who influences the pattern of men's behaviour to be disobedient to God's will for them. His influence began with the first temptation and has continued ever since. The temptation of Eve gives us some useful insights to this influence. First Satan tries to undermine God's word: "Has God said?" (Genesis 3:1). This is intended to create doubt in the mind and negate the goodness of God. Then the temptation of the fruit has three aspects (see Genesis 3:6). It was "good for food"; appealing to the basic appetite. It was "pleasant to the eyes"; good to look at. It was "desired to make one wise"; gave power. In the Gospels, we read of the devil's temptation of the Lord Jesus. This follows a similar pattern to the temptation of Eve: food to eat, a miracle for onlookers to see, and power over the kingdoms of the earth (Matthew 4:1-11). The Lord overcomes his attempts by reference to the word of God and obedience to it. The example of the Lord continues to be an encouragement to obedient Christians.

Finally, disobedience to God has so characterised mankind that Paul describes them as "sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). He also reminds Christians that, before we came to know Christ as our Saviour, we were marked by the same behaviour. It was our way of life to follow the will of our sinful nature which would lead ultimately to God's judgement. It is from this state of death, from the devil's influence and from disobedience that God has acted to bring us into life.

### **Alive because of God's mercy, love and grace (verses 4-8a)**

After Paul's description of spiritual death, we have one of the great "Buts" of scripture. Verses 1-3 of Ephesians 2 paint a dark, stormy picture of man's condition. Then we get a shining rainbow. It is rainbow of three glorious colours: God's rich mercy, God's great love and God's grace. When all seemed lost, God steps in: "But God" (verse 4). He acts to bring us out of death into life. He does this in three ways. First, by mercy. Mercy recognises and meets the needs of those who cannot help themselves. If I see someone who is homeless and hungry and give them food and shelter, I recognise their needs and meet them. God is described as being rich in mercy. This is no grudging attitude but God's mercy is characterised by willingness and wealth.

In the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, Jesus describes Himself as the Samaritan. In Luke 10:33 we get another great "But". "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was". The Samaritan met the needs of someone who was left for dead. At his own cost, he willingly goes to where the need is. He poured oil and wine in to the man's wounds. That wonderful picture of the richness of God's mercy through Christ, bringing the Spirit's power and joy where there had been tremendous need. The Samaritan not only healed the man but took him to an inn where he was cared for. He effectively gave him life. In the same way, we have not only been given life but brought into the church of God where, under the direction of the Spirit of God and in fellowship with other believers, that life can be nurtured and expressed.

The second action of God is His great love. God is love and it is His nature which is the source of love to us. It is great love because of the cost involved - the sacrifice of His only Son the Lord Jesus. It is great because He loved us when we were "dead in sins". It is also great because it has "made us alive". There is nothing more final than death. But Christ has defeated death and, through resurrection, given us life with God now and the hope of resurrection in the future. We are "alive together with Christ" (verse 5). We are linked to Him in heaven through the Holy Spirit who indwells our hearts.

In the womb, a child's life is sustained by its mother. There is an umbilical cord which links the child to its mother. Life is sustained by that link. We are linked to Christ by the Holy Spirit. We share the same life and the link is an eternal one. Sometimes a mother has twins or even triplets. As believers, we share in Christ's life both as individuals and collectively as members of His church. It is this life which enables us to have fellowship with God and with one another. It also enables us to serve and worship Him.

The third action is God's grace. After the downfall of Ceausescu's regime in Romania, we discovered the awful conditions in which of thousands of orphans in that country lived. A lot of aid was given and work put into improving the conditions of these poor children. Mercy was shown. However some went further and adopted children into their own families and gave them new lives. That was grace. God has not only met us in mercy but also by grace. He did not only taken away our sin and forgive us; He made us his children. Our Father is God, our home is heaven and our life is Christ. In a future day, the whole universe will witness the life we have with Christ. It we will be a testimony to the rich mercy, the great love and the grace of God.

I remember many years ago seeing St. Paul's Cathedral in London for the first time. It is a majestic building which stands as a great monument to the genius of one man, Christopher Wren. Everyone can see it and marvel at the brilliance of its creator. In the same way, the life and position which the Church has in Christ will stand as the greatest tribute to the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us though Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). In the early church there was a wonderful expression of this. It should also be expressed today amongst the people of God.

### **Living faith, living works and living worship (verses 8b-10)**

It is by grace we are saved but faith needs to be exercised. For us to have life, we need to have faith. In Numbers 21, in the Old Testament, we read the story of the occasion when the children of Israel were plagued by serpents. Moses was instructed by God to make a brazen serpent and put it on a pole. Whoever was bitten simply had to look at the serpent and he would live (Numbers 21:8). It is a striking picture of faith in Christ. The Lord Jesus refers to this event in John 3:14-15, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life". It is by faith in the Lord Jesus and His finished work upon the cross that we are saved and receive life.

This faith is a gift of God. In this passage in Ephesians the emphasis is upon what God has done. This does not take away our responsibility; it simply recognises that life is from God. He is the creator and sustainer of physical life and so, too, of spiritual life. It is not by our own works. Good works cannot save us. A dead man is incapable of doing anything to make himself alive. Just as God breathed life into the first man, so He awakens in us a sense of need and imparts faith to turn to Christ and receive life in Him.

Adam was the workmanship of God. He formed him from the dust of the earth and breathed life into him. We are also His workmanship according to verse 10. When a great building like the temple was constructed, the key to it was the cornerstone. The whole building was erected in relationship to one great cornerstone. So it is with the people of God. Christ is the "chief cornerstone" (1 Peter 2:6-7).

You cannot think of anything more dead than a stone. Yet in the Bible, God often uses the dead stone to demonstrate His power to give life. It was a dead stone which killed Goliath and gave life to Israel in 1 Samuel 17:50. It was a dead stone which Jesus could have commanded to be made into bread to give life in Matthew 4:3. It was dead stone which God could have made into living children of Abraham in Matthew 3:9. Dead stones would have given living praise to the Lord Jesus if the disciples had remained silent in Luke 19:40. And Christ Himself is described as a "living stone" in 1 Peter 2:4.

Peter also refers to Christians "as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). It is a powerful metaphor which God uses to describe the life which we now possess in Him. We who were "dead in trespasses and sins" are now alive to God and able to live for Him and offer worship to Him.

This life is to be expressed in two important ways. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul explains that we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." When the Lord Jesus was in the world, He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). His life was expressed through the good He did and so it should be with us. If we have life, then it must be expressed in the good works we do. These good works do not save us but show that we are saved. We are to live as the Saviour lived. John writes in 1 John 2:6, "He that saith he abides in Him (or lives in Him), ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

The other way in which our life in Christ is to be expressed is in worship. In the Gospel of John 4, Jesus spoke to a women by the well at Sychar about living water (verse 10). He then went on to speak to her about worship (verses 23-

24). As soon as a child is born, it begins to communicate and to look up to its parents. This communication begins very simply but develops as the years pass until the child communicates intelligently. God wants us to communicate with Him. He values our simple praise and worship but He also would like us to grow to worship Him more.

I once read the true story of a drunken fish seller from Glasgow. He was well known for drinking, gambling and swearing. His wife and children often suffered from his temper and lack of money. One night he stumbled into a small Gospel Hall. He was so drunk he could hardly understand what was being said. But at the end of the meeting, the preacher went to him and quietly and patiently explained the way of salvation. The man gradually sobered up and simply trusted in Christ as his Saviour. When he returned home, he told his wife he had been saved. Her response was, "Drunk again!!" Before they went to bed, the man insisted that they pray together. As they knelt down, he suddenly realised he had never prayed in his life and did not know what to say. Taking his cap in his hand, as he did when he went every Saturday afternoon to watch Glasgow Rangers, he swung it about his head and shouted, "Hurrah for Jesus!" This was a simple act of worship of a babe in Christ. As the days followed, his drinking and gambling stopped, his wife and children were well fed and cared for and soon his business was thriving. He also grew into an intelligent worshipper of God. The life God had given him was expressed in his works of faith and a worshipping heart.

May God give us the grace to express the life we have in Christ by our faith, our works, our fellowship and our worship.

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