

## PART 2:

# The Exciting Discovery of the Spirit-filled Life

From a sermon delivered by the editor in the United Methodist Church, Bogata, Texas, March 18, 1973.

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10.

"(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.)" 1 John 1:2.

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." 1 John 5: 11.

Only God's Word and God's Spirit can reveal to the human mind the immeasurable greatness of the Christian's life. The Christian's life is in Christ. It is nothing less than Christ Himself. Says the apostle Paul, "**Christ. . . is our life.**" Col. 3:4.

From eternity Christ was equal with the Father. He was the glory of heaven. But He laid aside His royal crown and humbled Himself to take man's nature. The Majesty of heaven was born in a donkey's food box because there was no room for Him among men. All things were made by Him, yet on earth He had not where to lay His head. He was unrecognized and unhonored, yet He gave to the world an exact representation of the character of God.

The lifewhich He lived in human flesh before the wondering universe was not for Himself but for us. He was our Substitute and our Representative. Before divine justice we are obligated to render perfect obedience to the law of God (Rom.2:13). Righteousness is obedience to the law. This we owe to the law, but as sinners we are incapable of rendering it. In our place and in our name, Christ gave to that law all that justice required. His was a life of wonderful humility and infinite perfection. He not only did no sin, but He went about doing good. He was the unwearied servant of man's necessities. He did nothing for Himself. In that royal life there was not one selfish act, rude word, impatient look, impure thought or unholy disposition. In His humanity He revealed every divine excellence and every noble attribute.

Thus St. Paul declares, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Rom. 10:4. That is to say, in Jesus Christ there is a

life which totally fulfills the law, a life which measures with all the greatness and grandeur of God's law.

In another place the apostle says, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5:21. That is to say, Christ's life contains the righteousness of God—all God's righteousness in its infinite totality.

Again the apostle declares, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Col. 2:9. Talk about a Spirit-filled life . . .! The life of the Man Christ Jesus was filled with all the eternal fulness of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. In this life are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col.2:3).

Not only is Christ's life without sin, but it is a life in which there is no death. Although He tasted death for every man, He "abolished death" and "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1 :10). His is a life which is raised far above the power of death and above all principalities and powers.

As believers, we must confess that our life is all that and nothing less than that, for "**Christ. . . is our life.**" Let the imagination take it in. Oh, but it can never take it in! Behold the life God has freely given us in the gift of His Son. He has given us a life which measures with the greatness and grandeur of God's law; a life that contains all of God's righteousness, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, all the fulness of the Godhead; a life in which there is no sin, no death; but a life raised far above the power of death and bathed in eternal glory.

When God gave us Jesus, He gave us a life so abundant that Paul could only say that God "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph.1:3). God emptied all heaven. He gathered up the riches of the universe, laid open the resources of infinite power and poured out all the accumulated love of eternity in the gift of Jesus. He would not have it said that one blessing in all His vast ocean of infinite blessedness was withheld. And all this He gave so that "in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness

toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph.2:7, R.S.V.).

The life which God has given us is so abundant that it is greater and higher than the highest human thought can reach. It "surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19, R.S.V.). What mind can comprehend the fulness of the riches of the Godhead? No wonder Paul exclaims:

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. . . . **NOW WE** have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." 1 Cor. 2:9, 10, 12.

Yet if we did not see this "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" "through a glass, darkly," the overpowering glory of it would blot us out of existence.

"Christ ... is our life." Nothing but the Holy Spirit could give us the faith to discover a life so amazing. Faith looks to all that the life of Christ did and all that the life of Christ contains, and says, "Mine are all these works and deeds, mine as much as if I had lived and performed them myself."

#### Where Is the Christian's Life?

In order that this inestimable treasure might be eternally secure to every believer, God took this life out of this earth and placed it at His own right hand in heaven. The Christian's life is secure at the right hand of God. His treasure is in heaven, where no thief can break in and steal it. So the apostle wrote to the Colossian believers:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Col. 3:1-4.

Do not fail to notice the location of the Christian's life. "*Your life is hid with Christ in God. ... Christ. .. is our life.*" This is our inheritance, and it is laid up for us in heaven. For Peter declares:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are

kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-5.

Through the Spirit the believer enjoys only the "firstfruits," or "down payment," of his inheritance here and now (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:13, 14). He knows that his fulfillment is only realized in Christ (Col. 2:10), so he patiently waits for Him to appear. Meanwhile, the Christian's righteousness is in heaven (Jer. 23:6; Isa. 45:24, 25). The city of his affections is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). And his real life is in heaven (Col. 3:4).

Faith to know that our real life is outside of ourselves gives us the courage to face anything. Why need we be anxious about this earthly life, fretting when we do not have things or grieving when we lose them? As Luther could sing with holy defiance as he marched off to the Diet of Worms:

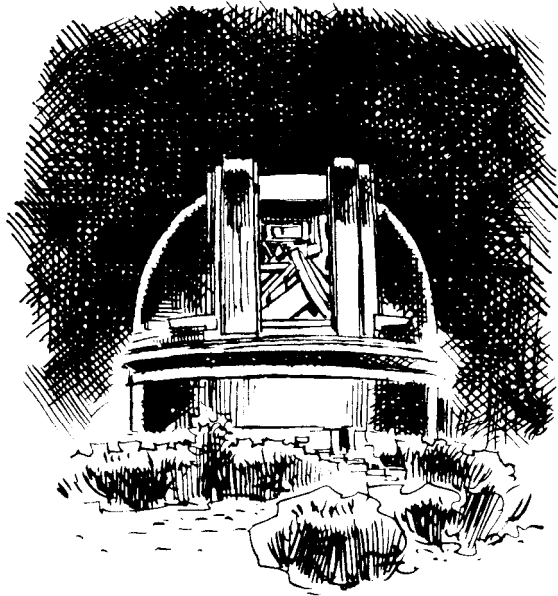
"Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still."

When faced with the prospect of death at the hands of his enemies, Luther remarked, "Let them take my old, wretched life if they will. They will only render me a service." He knew that his real life was where no demon or human foe could touch it.

#### Dwelling in Heaven or Dwelling on Earth?

What, then, is the exciting discovery of *the Spirit-filled life*? It is a life lived 2,000 years ago. It contains all of God's fulness, all of His wisdom and knowledge, and all of His righteousness. It is a life of wondrous perfection and infinite blessedness. Through faith that life is ours. It is laid up surely in heaven. It justifies us in the sight of God and entitles us to receive as much of the Holy Spirit that God sees we need until we shall be glorified at Christ's appearing.

In view of this glorious gospel, we are concerned at the direction of much of this "deeper-life piety." We are concerned because it is causing people to settle on something far less than the life more abundant. We are concerned because people are being taught to look to the wrong life. Their attention is directed inward to their own experience, and they suppose that, having some internal fulfillment of an abundant life, they are ready to go out and proclaim the exciting discovery of their Spirit-filled experience.



A friend told me of how he climbed Mt. Palomar, several thousand feet above a smog-filled California valley. He had a marvelous sensation of elevation and achievement. But then he looked through that great telescope and saw the galaxies out in space, millions of light-years above Mt. Palomar. As he contemplated those distances so vast that they boggle the mind, Mt. Palomar by comparison seemed like an insignificant pimple. So the abundant life which God has given us in Jesus Christ is as high above the highest experience of the saint down here on this earth as those galaxies are above Mt. Palomar. When people glory in their own "Spirit-filled" experience, it is because they have not looked through the telescope of God's Word to see the life filled with all of God's fulness. Instead, they run around, bragging about some feeble experience in this mortal existence. What a fantastic misrepresentation of the greatness and grandeur of the abundant life which God has given us in Jesus Christ!

No wonder the apostle Paul was concerned when he saw the Colossian church being led away from the gospel to look for some fulfillment and fulness in their earthly experience. After telling the church that such fulness is found only in Christ (Col. 2:9, 10), he made his Christ-centered appeal:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Col. 3:1-4.

Again, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul

warns the church against those who would "glory" in the "flesh" (see chap. 3). After speaking very humbly about his own experience and attainments, Paul admonished them:

"(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly [inward parts], and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)" Phil. 3:18, 19.

The apostle is not here referring to ordinary worldliness or gluttony. He is issuing a sharp warning against a false "gospel." He has in mind those who would glory in something other than the cross of Jesus Christ. Their gaze is on themselves. They cannot see any higher than their own spiritual navels. Then Paul adds by way of contrast, "For our conversation [life] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Phil. 3:20. These words are so clear that he who runs may read.

Is the life in which we glory in heaven or on earth? That was St. Paul's vital question to the Colossians and the Philippians. And it is the vital question of this hour.

Just a few days ago a certain Protestant clergyman was teaching a group of children this new (old) existential theology. He said, "Once we used to believe and teach that Christ was up there somewhere in heaven. Now we teach He is inside of us, that the heart is His throne and this is the dwelling place of God." Now, no Bible-believing Christian doubts that, through the Word and Spirit, Christ dwells in the heart of the Christian. But when this is stated in such a way that it undermines or does away with the pre-eminent doctrine of the exalted, objective Christ at the right hand of God, the door is thrown wide open to mysticism, spiritualism, pantheism and the most sentimental spiritual drivel.

In the Revelation, chapter 13, there are two groups brought to view—those who dwell on earth (Rev. 13:8, 14) and those who dwell in heaven (Rev. 13:6). That is to say, one class of worshipers find their fulfillment in that exalted life at the right hand of God; the other class of worshipers seek fulfillment on earth within themselves. This chapter is of immense importance to us today. It describes with fearful accuracy where Protestantism is now headed under the influence of so-called revivals (see Rev. 13:13, 14). It describes the final battle between the religion of heaven and the religion of earth. This battle we are now beginning to enter, and the religious world is now being polarized for the conflict.