

2 Corinthians Chapter 5 Paul's Testimony Concerning Supernatural Life for the Body

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and dependence on Christ's strength in receiving the supernatural life that He offers, which gives us the power to overcome conflicts and struggles and to live a life of glory and immortality.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:31, John 14:19, Romans 8:11, 2 Corinthians 4:11, 2 Corinthians 5:1, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 3:16, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Strength in Weakness", "Supernatural Life"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 5, illustrating the significance of the supernatural life that Christ imparts to our mortal bodies. He explains that while our physical existence is frail, it is through the life of Jesus that we find strength and endurance amidst trials and suffering. Simpson highlights that this divine power is not merely a concept but a reality that believers can experience daily through faith and dependence on Christ. He reassures that the struggles we face are part of the process of receiving this supernatural life, which ultimately leads to the promise of eternal glory. The message culminates in the hope of resurrection and the eternal life that awaits believers.

Transcript

"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." 2 Cor. 4: 11.

Unlike many false religions, Christianity does not depreciate or degrade the human body. The very paragon of the first creation, God has no less dignified it in the new creation. His own Son did not deem it beneath Him to become incarnate in our mortal frame, and in that body He has been resurrected and glorified as the Head and Pattern of our future life. The provisions of Christ's redemption include the body as well as the soul and spirit.

While it is only the steed that carries the traveler across the desert journey of life, yet the steed is most necessary to the traveler, and the failure of the one may involve the destruction of the other. Christ and His apostles, therefore, recognized most distinctly the place of our physical life in the scheme of redemption, and both by their teaching and example they leave us in no doubt about God's provision for our physical healing and the strength that we need in these earthen vessels to uphold us until our work is

done.

Man has always been seeking some Fountain of Youth, some Elixir of Life from which he might draw supernatural supplies of strength for his decaying powers. But all these have failed, and from age to age still

"Our hearts, like muffled drums, are beating

Funeral marches to the grave."

But Paul must have discovered some new and divine secret of superior strength or he never could have told that story that we have already read in chapter 1: 8, of the deliverance that came to him in Asia when he was "pressed out of measure above strength, insomuch that he despaired even of life." The story of his life is full of hardship, privation, exposure and suffering sufficient to have worn out a dozen lives.

The man who could give this catalogue, "in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft, five times received I forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep," and yet live to a good old age in the full vigor of unwearied work and still have strength enough to have gone on indefinitely had not his noble life been suddenly closed by martyrdom; such a man must have had unwonted sources of physical strength and endurance and his physical life was as much a miracle as his spiritual victories and missionary achievements.

In this fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians he tells us the secret of his strength. Unlike Samson of old, from whom this secret had to be wrung by treachery, Paul glories in the telling of it, for it is an open secret for every brother of his suffering race.

I. The Principle

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." He means that the strength imparted to him is not in the form of bone and brawn or any material conditions which could appeal to our outward senses. It is not that his body was exceptionally robust, for, indeed, it remained frail to the end; but rather that a principle of vitality was imparted to it, so that the paradox was literally true, "when I am weak, then am I strong."

We know that even in the natural world many elements that are extremely common and simple become the channels of tremendous forces. Radium, the latest of these discovered powers, comes from one of the commonest material elements, pitchblende, which might perhaps be called a kind of tar. The loadstone which lifts the heaviest bodies, does not derive its strength from its material weight or form, but from a hidden force that pulsates within the cold clay and lifts the most massive weights as though by celestial fingers. In the arsenal at Woolwich, you can see these magnets lifting vast projectiles and pieces of ordnance as though they were toys.

The electric current which carries our trains and our cars and moves our factories does not need massive iron girders to convey it, but runs along a little wire which a child might bend. The power is not in the material, but in the invisible current behind it. The human body itself does not derive its strength from mere structural form. A giant seven feet high, weighing three hundred pounds, falls like a mass of stone if life becomes extinct and requires several men to carry him; but animated by the principle of life, he cannot only carry his own weight, but as much more besides.

Now, in the spiritual realm there are forces far stronger than electricity, magnetism or the vital force, and what the apostle means is that such a force has been brought into touch with his weak body; and while he still remains weak in himself, he has found back of him and within him a new source of strength which makes him equal to every pressure. It is the "treasure" in "the earthen vessel," and it proves to the world that the "excellency of the power is of God and not of us."

II. The Secret of His Physical Life

He tells us in plain terms just what this power is. It is not an electric current, it is not the power of mind or will as Christian Science would teach us, but it is the power of a divine Person, the life of another added to his own, "the life also of Jesus in his mortal flesh." Truly, this is a mystery, how one life can be added to another, and doubtless none will comprehend it unless they have in some measure experienced it. But a moment's reflection will show us how reasonable it is. The Lord Jesus Christ is a Living Being in human form. They saw Him rise from earth to heaven with all the organs and members of a literal body, and yet with such supernal power in that body that He could spurn the fetters of earth and the forces of gravitation and rise without an effort into space. Now, He is still living in that glorified humanity somewhere in the center of this universe, and from that exalted place He is still in touch with His people here. The Holy Spirit is the mighty Medium who conveys to us His power and life, the divine Engineer, if we may use the figure without irreverence, who makes and maintains the contact between the mighty Dynamo yonder and our weak natures here on earth.

It is not thought strange in our modern scientific progress when men convey the power of Niagara Falls hundreds of miles along electric wires to run machines in distant places. It is not thought strange that yonder sun, 95,000,000 miles away, can send down its radiating life to quicken the forces of nature and create the verdure, the bloom and the manifold fruitfulness of earth. Why should it be thought strange that Jesus Christ, from the center of the universe, should be able to impart to souls and bodies that are in vital touch with Him, His own overflowing life and make His promise true both in our bodily and spiritual experience, "Because I live, you shall live also"?

If we look at a single scene in the apostle's life, we shall see the operation of this secret. Yonder at the gates of Lystra a cruel mob has hurled him beneath a heap of stones and left him for dead after they have done their worst on his mutilated body. But we read in the simple narrative of the book of Acts, "Howbeit as the disciples stood around him he rose up and stood upon his feet and came into the city, and the next day departed for Derbe, and there he preached the Gospel." What was the strange power that raised him up from seeming martyrdom? The answer is the simple, striking expression of our text: "The life also of Jesus." Paul's life had been beaten out but there was just enough left, a single spark, to form the point of contact with that other life that could not be beaten out, the life of his indwelling Lord; and as that life thrilled through his paralyzed powers, he rose up in new divine strength and quietly went forward in his work.

George Whitfield has left us a similar testimony of a day when he was supposed to be dying some miles from Newburyport while the congregation there was praying in tearful intercession that God would restore his life. Suddenly, he tells us, a new strange life began to breathe through him and passed through his frame, gradually rising from his extremities until it reached his heart and lungs and brain, imparting a quiet, peaceful glow of conscious strength and rest, dispelling all pain and weakness and prompting him to rise and dress, to call his carriage and drive many miles to Newburyport where the church was waiting to hear each moment of his end.

His coming seemed at first almost like an apparition, but when they saw that God had really raised him up and listened to his testimony, the power of God came down once more and multitudes were saved, and for many years the good evangelist continued in the strength of God to preach the Gospel and to finish his work.

III. The Pressure and the Test That Followed

There is a prevalent idea that the power of God in a human life should lift us above all trials, conflicts and struggles. The fact is the power of God always brings a conflict and a struggle. One would have thought that on his great missionary journey to Rome Paul would have been carried by some mighty providence above the power of storms and tempests and enemies. But, on the contrary, it was one long, hard fight with persecuting Jews, with wild tempests, with venomous vipers and all the powers of earth and hell, and at last he was saved, as it seemed, by the narrowest margin and had to swim ashore at Malta on a piece of wreckage and barely escape a watery grave.

Was that like a God of infinite power? Yes, just like Him. And so Paul tells us that when he took the Lord Jesus Christ, as the life of his body, a severe conflict immediately came; indeed, a conflict that never ended, a pressure that was persistent, but out of which he always emerged victorious through the strength of Jesus Christ.

The language in which he describes this is most graphic. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body."

What a ceaseless, strenuous struggle? It is impossible to express in English the forcible language of the original. There are five pictures in succession. In the first, the idea is crowding enemies pressing in from every side, and yet not crushing him because the police of heaven cleared the way just wide enough for him to get through. The literal translation would be, "We are crowded on every side, but not crushed."

The second picture is that of one whose way seems utterly closed and yet he has pressed through; there is light enough to show him the next step. The revised version translates it, "perplexed but not unto despair." Rotherham still more literally renders it, "without a way but not without a byway."

The third figure is that of an enemy in hot pursuit while the divine Defender still stands by, and he is not left alone. Again we adopt the fine rendering of Rotherham, "Pursued but not abandoned."

The fourth figure is still more vivid and dramatic. The enemy has overtaken him, has struck him, has knocked him down. But it is not a fatal blow; he is able to rise again. It might be translated, "over-thrown but not overcome."

Once more the figure advances, and now it seems to be even death itself, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." But he does not die, for "The life also of Jesus" now comes to his aid and he lives in the life of another until his work is done.

The reason so many fail in the experience of divine healing is because they expect to have it all without a struggle, and when the conflict comes and the battle wages long, they become discouraged and surrender. God has nothing worth having that is easy. There are no cheap goods in the heavenly market. Our redemption cost all that God had to give and everything worth having is expensive. Hard places are

the very school of faith and character, and if we are to rise over mere human strength and prove the power of life divine in these mortal bodies, it must be through a process of conflict that may well be called the birth travail of a new life. It is the old figure of the bush that burned but was not consumed, or of the Vision in the house of the Interpreter of the flame that would not expire, notwithstanding the fact that the demon ceaselessly poured water on it because in the background stood an angel ever pouring oil and keeping the flame aglow.

No, dear suffering child of God, you cannot fail if only you dare to believe, to stand fast and refuse to be overcome.

IV. The Process of Receiving This Supernatural Life

1. It is by faith. "I believe, and therefore have I spoken; we therefore believe and likewise speak." We can only retain the life of Christ while we trust Him.

2. It must be moment by moment and day by day. "For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." It must be a habit of receiving, a constant dependence. It is not one or two remarkable experiences of healing, but a lifelong drinking in of strength from Christ even as the plant continually draws its nourishment from the soil by ten thousand rootlets. It is here that we must learn to maintain the habit of physical union with Christ and vital dependence upon His strength, breath by breath and step by step.

V. The Pledge of Future Glory

All this is but the earnest of something better by-and-by. Therefore the apostle adds, "We know that if the earthly house of this tent were taken down, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And then he adds a little later, "Now He that has wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." The apostle means that the life of Jesus in our bodies now is but the beginning and the pledge of that glorious life which is to come to us at the resurrection and the kingdom above. Just as the bulb you plant in autumn has in it the promise of the Easter lily and the acorn is but an oak in miniature, and the seed carries in its bosom the embryo of the golden harvest, so the touch of Christ upon our bodies now carries with it the pledge and the very substance of all the glorious immortality which is to be ours in the age to come.

What a sad morning that was when our first parents went forth weeping and ashamed from the gates of Eden and knew that the Tree of Life was henceforth closed to them as the source of physical immortality. What a glad moment that would be if a glorious angel should come down from heaven and plant it in our gardens once more.

Something better we are permitted to bring in this glorious message of the supernatural life of Christ. Not only are we permitted to transplant from the soil of heaven the Tree of Life, but He, who is the source of life itself, has come down not only to walk among us for a little while as an example of the life divine, but to dwell within us as the perennial foundation in our entire being of that life which, although exposed to conflict and testing and suffering now, is pressing on through storm and wind and tide to that glorious hour when:

"His gracious hand shall wipe the tears

From every weeping eye;

And pains and groans and griefs and fears

And Death itself shall die."

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