

Epistles of John Chapter 1 the Life

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon explores the multifaceted nature of life as revealed through Christ, emphasizing His eternal existence, sacrificial death, and transformative resurrection.

Scripture: John 10:10, John 14:6, Romans 6:4, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:27, 1 John 1:2-3

Topics: "Eternal Life", "The Life of Christ"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the theme of 'life' as central to the Gospel and Epistles of John, illustrating how Christ embodies eternal life and manifests it through His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and indwelling presence in believers. He explains that while other teachings focus on moral truths, John's writings reveal the transformative power of divine life that believers can experience. Simpson highlights the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, asserting that through faith, believers can partake in this eternal life, which is not only a future promise but a present reality. The sermon calls for a deeper understanding of how Christ's life and sacrifice enable believers to live in holiness and victory over sin. Ultimately, Simpson encourages the congregation to embrace the fullness of life found in Christ, who is the source of all spiritual vitality.

Transcript

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

"This is the true God, and eternal life. (1 John 5:20.)

Could we compress into a single word all the voices of nature and redemption on Easter morning, that one word which would come throbbing from the full pulses of the spring, the flowers, the bursting buds, the songs of birds, the open grave of the risen Lord, and the overflowing hearts and thankful praises of rejoicing saints would be -- LIFE.

And this one significant word is the keynote of the profoundest books in the New Testament, the Gospel and the Epistles of John. The others tell us of the truth and character and righteousness, but these tell us of life. The others tell us what to do and be, but these tell us the secret of what we may become and how we may accomplish the things set before us. The mystery of nature is life. The one thing short of which all man's wisdom and resources reach is life. Science can give us the principles of things and can even construct the forces of nature, but only God can give this strange and subtle thrill which sets all in

spontaneous motion and gives it life.

The Sermon on the Mount tells us what an ideal life should be, but the Gospel of John tells us how that ideal may become a reality. It starts with the mysterious secret of the new birth where life begins, and it leads up to the highest developments of the sanctified and glorified life in the age to come. The Epistles of John still more fully unfold the source, the evolution and the outflow of divine life. Let us follow it through five successive stages.

I. CHRIST IS THE ETERNAL LIFE

Before a planet rolled, an insect buzzed, or an angel sang, Christ was Himself the eternal life. Our text has in the original a stronger emphasis than the received version expresses, and it reads literally thus: "We show unto you that life, the eternal, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." And so our second text more fully expresses the same thought, "This is the true God, and the life eternal." Jesus is the Life and from Him all life has come. The life of nature is the outflow of His creating power. The life of mind and thought and intellect is but a radiation from His infinite mind. The power that moves the universe from the mightiest sphere to the minutest spray is His personal life, for "By him all things consist," and "In him we live and move and have our being." The tint of the Easter lily, the fragrance of the hyacinth, the teeming life of the vegetable world all come from Him. The birth of every newborn soul is begotten of His life. The Church of every age and clime is the new creation of His life and power. The life of every saint is sustained every moment by the life of his living Head. It is so good therefore, to know that His life is life eternal and that in Him there is a fountain of life that never can run dry, a sufficiency that never can fail. The word "eternal" here does not merely convey the idea of existence that has neither beginning nor ending, but it lifts us into a higher sphere of life. It is a kind of life that belongs to a loftier plane than the things that are seen and temporal. It is a life that is as infinite in its scope as it is enduring in its length; a great, unfathomable ocean of infinite fullness and glorious all-sufficiency. This Easter morning let us adore the Prince of Life, the Living One, the glorious Son of God who stands before us in His radiant and eternal life, proclaiming, "I am he that lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."

II. THE LIFE MANIFESTED

"The life was manifested." This includes the whole story of the incarnation and earthly life of the Lord Jesus. This also covers the meaning of the phrase so often used by John in his Gospel and Epistle, "The Word of life." Here it is in the original, "The Word of the life." Just as a word is the expression of a human thought, so He is to us the expression of God's thought and will, the manifestation to us of what was already there, but unrevealed. Instead of giving us merely a written word He sends to us a living person to exhibit in the actual details of His earthly life the character of God, and His purposes of love to the human race. The story is a familiar one of the missionary who had failed to bring conviction to the savages of the Congo by years of preaching, at last stopped in the midst of a course of lessons on the Sermon on the Mount and announced to the Africans that he was going to live this chapter himself among them. Before the day was over they gave him ample opportunities of doing so by claiming all his worldly goods and he, unresistingly, gave "to him that asked and from him that would borrow turned not away." At nightfall the missionary's wife was in dismay, for her home was stripped and starvation stared them in the face. But that was only the first act in the drama. Before the night was over the natives began to reflect upon the strange example they had witnessed. This man, they said, is not like the traders. He does not ask us for things, but he gives us all he has. He must be God's man, and we had better be careful how we treat him. And so the following day witnessed the scene of yesterday reversed and everything brought back with

compound interest. This was the second act. The third act was a great revival, the conversion of a thousand souls, and the organization of the largest church on the Congo. "The life was manifested" and they saw it, and it was an object lesson more mighty than any words. So Christ has manifested in His life the message of the Father and the meaning of the Gospel. His earthly life was a complete pattern of all that God expects a true human life to be. For the first time in the history of the race the Father beheld a man of whom He could say, "In him I am well pleased." Christ's human life covered every side of our experience touching the physical and the spiritual and every earthly relationship that we are called to sustain. The life was manifested in every tint and shade and in every minute detail of a typical human experience so that there is no situation which can arise to which we may not apply the simple watchword, "What would Jesus do?" In our zeal for the great doctrines connected with His death, let us never depreciate the value of His life, and the importance of His perfect example, both as a revelation of God and as an ideal for humanity.

III. THE LIFE CRUCIFIED

While we must not undervalue the life of Christ, we cannot overestimate the significance of His death. There is a school of teachers who say much about Christian Socialism and the application of Christ's example to the practical details of all our social and secular questions. But these men stop short of Calvary and leave out of view that great event which is the key to all Scripture and all Christian hope and experience. And so we very soon come, even in this deeply spiritual epistle, to that expression which bids us pause with a hush of holy awe and tenderness -- the blood. John has hardly got started in his letter before two deep crimson shades cover all the page, the one the dark stain of sin, the other the precious blood of Christ. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1: 7.) This is the great fact back of Easter and the resurrection, the cross of Calvary, the death of Jesus Christ, the life so divine, so human, so beautiful, laid down in sacrifice and self-surrender, not only as an example of submission and resignation, teaching us how to die; but a ransom for the guilty and a satisfaction to the righteousness of God for the sins of men. With all his deep insight into the spirit and life of Jesus, John, above all the disciples, recognized the sacrificial meaning of His blood. "Behold the Lamb of God," seems to ring out as the undertone of all his beautiful Gospel. "The blood of Jesus Christ" is the background of his epistle. "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood," is the keynote of the oft-repeated redemption song of his sublime Apocalypse. The blood of Jesus Christ just means His life, with all its infinite value given as a substitute and ransom for our forfeited life.

Now it is not enough for us to appreciate in a sentimental way the sufferings of our Lord, and weep in sympathy over His shame and agony -- all this we may do over some pathetic story of human sorrows; all this we may do under the spell of moving eloquence, and yet know nothing of the power of Christ's blood. The death of Christ stands for a great and potential fact, and it is of no value to us until faith enters into partnership with Him in that fact, and knows by personal appropriation "the fellowship of his sufferings." The death of Christ simply means for me that when He died I died, and in God's view I am now as if I had been executed for my own sin and was now recognized as another person who has risen with Christ and is justified from his former sins because he has been executed for them, "For he that is dead is freed from sin." Not only so, it is the secret of my sanctification, for in that cross of Calvary, I, the sinful self, was put to death, and when I lay myself over with Him upon that cross, and reckon my self dead, Christ's risen life passes into me and it is no longer my struggling, my goodness or my badness, but my Lord who lives in me, and through whom, while I abide in Him, I am counted even as He and enabled to walk even as He walked.

Beloved, have you entered into the death of Christ and counted it yours, and through it are you now alive unto Him in "the power of His resurrection"?

IV. THE LIFE RISEN

It is just as wrong to stop at the cross as it is to stop before coming to the cross. It is just as wrong to have merely a dead Christ as to eliminate the death of Christ from our theology. Christ's death is only the background for His resurrection. The life that was laid down was taken up again and now He stands before us saying, "I am he that lives and was dead." It is not the cross with the Savior hanging on it, but it is the cross on which He hung, but where He hangs no longer; the grave in which He lay, but open now, and the very gateway of life immortal. And so this passage is full of suggestions of the risen Lord. That which our hands handled of the Word of life brings back to us immediately the memory of the morning when He stood among them and said, "Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have." There is something infinitely touching in language like this from the pen of John, for he had leaned upon the Master's breast, and doubtless he had proved the reality of his Master's resurrection and claimed once more the familiar place and touch of love.

And this leads us to notice that this expression, the blood of Christ, has a higher and a deeper meaning in connection with the resurrection, for "the blood is the life," and it is the life of Jesus Christ, His risen life as well as His atoning death which cleanses us from all sin. We are "saved by his life," quite as truly as by His death. In one of the ancient types of Exodus we read of an occasion when Moses having sacrificed certain bullocks at the foot of the mount and shed their blood upon the altar, took part of the blood in basins and sprinkled it upon the people, and took it up with him into the mount where they met with God and were accepted because of the blood. This second action of the blood seems to denote the resurrection life of Christ, the life taken back again after it had been once laid down. And so this glad morning we celebrate the victory of our risen Lord and hail Him as the Prince of Life and the Living One, living now as the Conqueror of death, as the possessor of a new life, and as the Source and Head of that new life for all who are united to Him in His death and resurrection.

V. THE LIFE INDWELLING

For this life is not for Himself, but for us, and having risen from the dead He now comes to relive His life in us. This is the secret of sanctification as it is unfolded in the First Epistle of John, and it is the solution of every puzzling problem in connection with that epistle. Perhaps no portion of the New Testament has so many seeming contradictions on the subject of holiness as the First Epistle of John. For example, we are told in the first chapter, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and again, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." And yet a little later we are told with equal emphasis he that "is born of God does not commit sin; for his seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Now how can these be reconciled? It is all very simple. First it is true that we; that is, the human we, have sin and have sinned. There is no good in us and we have renounced ourselves as worthless and helpless; but on the other hand, we have taken Him to be our life and His life is a sinless one. The seed that He plants in us, as spotless as that beautiful bulb and blossom which you plant in the unclean soil, but which grows up as pure as an angel's wing unstained by the soil around it, belongs to another element and is in its own nature essentially and inherently pure.

The key to this whole mystery is supplied by two verses in this epistle. He that "abides in him sins not." (1 John 3: 6.) Here is the secret of holiness, it is "not our holiness but Him." There is no account made here of our perfection, but it is only as we cling to Him and draw our life each moment from Him that we are kept from sin. It is the indwelling life.

Again, "Whosoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not." (1 John 5: 18.) Here again the same truth is expressed in a different way. The only begotten Son of God, dwelling in us, keeps us from the power of sin and the assaults of Satan; and although the devil often strikes yet we are like the little insect with the pane of glass between it and the bird of prey, "and that wicked one touches us not."

There is one more passage which belongs to this connection. "He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life." (1 John 5: 12.) Here it is our union with the person of the Lord Jesus that constitutes the source of our spiritual life. The secret therefore which Paul had found, "Christ in you the hope of glory," is the secret also of the disciple who leaned yet closer on the Master's breast. God grant that it may be the secret of our life, too, and that we may know in all of His fullness the life eternal, the life manifested, and the life crucified, the resurrection life, and the life indwelling, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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