

# Words of Spirit and Life

by H.J. Vine

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*The Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, gives us eternal life and satisfies our spiritual hunger through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 8:35, Proverbs 13:14, Proverbs 16:22, John 4:14, John 6:27, John 6:35, John 6:51, John 6:63, John 7:38, Romans 5:21

**Topics:** "Eternal Life", "The Cross"

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## Description

H.J. Vine preaches on the profound impact of Jesus' words as spirit and life, emphasizing the necessity of His death for eternal life. Despite the miracles, many sought Jesus for physical sustenance, not realizing the spiritual depth of His teachings. Those who truly believe in Christ recognize the need for His sacrifice to receive eternal life, contrasting it with the perishable food of the world. Through Christ's death, believers find righteousness, life, and the promise of reigning in eternal life.

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## Transcript

"It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing: the words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63, N.Tr.).

Multitudes followed our Lord Jesus Christ, not because of Himself, the blessed Son of the living God, but because they had seen the miracle of the multiplied loaves and desired to be fed continuously by Him. His wonderful works in their midst were signs, showing the glory of Him who did them, but it was not for Himself but because they did eat of the loaves and were filled that they sought Him.

He knew this, and said to them, "Labour not for the meat which perishes." There is food to be had which abides unto eternal life. The Father now gives that food--the Living Bread out of heaven. Those who ate the manna in the wilderness died; but if any one shall have eaten of this Bread he shall live for ever. A wonderful proposal--"He shall LIVE FOR EVER!"

Surely such vital words as these, words of spirit and life, would produce a profound impression upon the hearers, and be eagerly welcomed by them. But such is not the case, either then or now. Some may say, in a sort of selfish ignorance, "Lord, ever give to us this Bread"; not understanding what is involved; but when tested, the natural mind murmurs at these words, and reasons them away (v. 42). The Lord announced the fact that His death was a necessity before this eternal life could be received by any--that though He Himself is the Bread of Life, nevertheless His flesh must be given for the life of the world, for

this life could not be confined to the Jews; but against this the religious mind contends; saying in unbelief, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" (v. 52). The unregenerate man whether religious or otherwise will not accept this as the only way of life. He will appropriate the outward benefits granted by a merciful Creator; or if religious will welcome, it may be, the questionable advantages of carnal religion; but will not appropriate the flesh and blood of the Son of Man in faith, as the only way of life eternal. It is not a question here of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. John gives neither the supper nor baptism. It is entirely a matter of the appropriation of faith, of receiving the truth into our hearts, as made known by our Lord's words of spirit and life.

Those who have learned from God, and have consequently been made to feel their need, knowing that death has passed upon all men, and upon themselves, for they like others have sinned; these appreciate and thankfully appropriate the blessed truth made known in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. They recognize that life (and righteousness along with it), can only be theirs through the death of which these vital words speak. Death entered the world by sin, and life can only be ours through a death which put sin away. Life is not to be obtained through carnal religion, whether it be called Judaism, Christianity, or anything else; it can only be ours through the death of the One of whom the true believer delights to sing:

"Our Lord, our Life, our Rest, our Shield,

Our Rock, our Food, our Light,

Each thought of Thee doth constant yield

Unchanging, fresh delight."

When such as these are tested, though others turn back, they say like Peter in verses 68-69, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God." It is a living, loving Person who is before their believing hearts; not a dead religious system. Christ becomes everything to them. The Gospel of John was written that life might be the portion of those who thus believe on Him, as we read, "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (20:31).

#### Life through Death

We are told that if there had been a law able to give life, then righteousness would be on the principle of law (Gal. 3:21). Life and righteousness necessarily go together. Paul's letter to the saints at Rome shows how righteousness reaches us; John 6, the way in which life is ours. Since there was no law which could quicken dead souls into life, some other way must be found, that life and righteousness might be ours. The upright soul under law finds that when the law speaks in power to him, it condemns him as in the flesh. "The commandment having come," he says, "sin revived, but I died, and the commandment, which was for life, was found, as to me, itself to be unto death" (Rom. 7:10, N.Tr.). Only through the death of One upon whom sin and death had no claim could life be ours. By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; by another Man, a sinless, holy, obedient Man, righteousness and life have been obtained for us through His death. A death, not necessary for Himself personally, but absolutely necessary if we were to have the justification of life, the abundance of God's free favour, and the free gift of righteousness, so that we might eventually reign in life by our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory and power for ever and ever. All this is ours through His death; and even now in the over-abounding of divine grace, because of that death, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life in all its fullness; even as previously sin

had reigned in all its lawlessness unto death (Rom. 5:21).

Before sin came in, "out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also" (Gen. 2:9). This tree of life in the midst of the garden was not forbidden to man; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was. After man had fallen, lest in that fallen and sinful condition he should "put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever; therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden" (Gen. 3. 22-23). The Cherubim and the flaming sword were then placed at the east of the garden to keep the way of the tree of life (v. 24). In grace our Lord Jesus Christ came into man's place of condemnation and death, and by the sacrifice of Himself put away the sin which had brought this about and opened for us the way of life. But if in the earliest chapters of the Bible we find man excluded from the tree of life in the midst of a paradise of innocence, in the closing chapters we find him redeemed through Christ's precious blood, and in the paradise of God--the paradise of holiness, eating of the Tree of Life, in a higher sphere and condition than before; in a realm of life and love and holiness, where sin can never come; in a scene of immortality, incorruptibility and unfading glory.

The death of our blessed Lord has opened up this way of life for us. His flesh has been given that we might have life. His blood has been shed to cleanse us from every sin. Every righteous claim that could be raised has been met; and life for the sinner has been secured. The one who knows his need appropriates by faith this way of life. And there is no other way; as verse 53 plainly states, "Unless YE SHALL HAVE EATEN the flesh of the Son of Man, and DRUNK His blood, ye have no life in yourselves" (N.Tr.).

There is a moment in the history of the soul when it receives in faith the story of Christ's redeeming love; when for the first time with personal interest it believes on Him, and can say, The Son of God loved ME and gave Himself for ME. Eternal life is consequently the present portion of such a one. For he that has the Son has life. He does not at once understand all that this means: possession and understanding are not the same. Now if verse 53 refers to that which we have done in the past to obtain life, verse 54 speaks of that which we do in the present; of that which is continuous, and characteristic of those who have eternal life. "He that EATS My flesh and DRINKS My blood has life eternal." The world is felt to be a wilderness wide by those who have eternal life. The springs of that life are outside of it, for Christ is the fountain of that life for us. But though there is nothing in the world to minister to our new life, yet, whilst in the world, that life which we have is abundantly sustained, in energy and freshness, as we feed upon the death of Him who is apart from it; and we thus prove experimentally the verity of His blessed words of spirit and life, "My flesh is truly food and My blood is truly drink" (v. 55, N.Tr.).

The glitter and glamour of the world has no charm for this new life of which we speak; though the believer has sin still in him; and if allowed to act it will lead him worldwards; like Lot, who, when leaving Abraham, pitched his tent towards Sodom. Like him too, the true believer would soon find his soul grieved, when drawn into the world; for it is made up of lust and pride (1 John 2:16). The new life can find no true joy or peace there. Christendom has largely sunk into the world. It has been said that in Popery the church sought to rule the world, but in Protestantism the world rules the church, and when the Lord comes, it seems evident that even Protestantism will be treated as the world by Him. For He comes as a thief to it: not as a bridegroom (Rev. 3:3). As a whole, the worldly religious systems will become Babylon; and when John was to see this false woman in all her gorgeous deckings, he was carried into a wilderness to behold her (Rev. 17:3). The true church was seen by him afterwards from a great and high mountain (Rev. 21:10); far above the mists and delusions of the world.

Those to whom the Lord has given eternal life are not of the world, but our separation from it must not be that of the monk or nun. Nor that of the Pharisees, who claim to be religious and orthodox, and set themselves apart from the general worldly drift, and yet do not enter into the living realities of which we have spoken; for they have not the Unction from Christ, the Holy Spirit. Of all religious professors, these seem to be the most wretched. Our blessed Lord came that we might have life, and have it in overflowing abundance; also that we might enjoy the precious privileges and intimacies of that life. Therefore He said again in verse 56, "He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me and I in him." Could we have a better dwelling and more exalted company? Could we have greater privilege and intimacy given to us in this world? The divine and heavenly graces of life eternal as we know the blessedness and power of them, will give character to us. It is as we dwell in Him and He in us that love, joy, and peace will mark us; holiness, righteousness, and truth will give colour to us; knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of a spiritual sort, will be ours in richer abundance and energy.

Our dwelling is no longer in the old man which corrupts itself, in its state of lawlessness and death; but in the Living One who died to sin once and now lives to God. We not only have life; but in Him we have left the old state and condition; and we are now blessed in the new. We have life: we have also passed out of death into life. There are three things that are true of every believer on the Son. (1) Life eternal is his. (2) The home of that life is also his, for he dwells in Christ. (3) The company also, which belongs to that life and home, is likewise his; for Christ dwells in him. All this has been secured for us by His death. Blessed be His holy name for ever! It is ours to enjoy in the energy of faith.

When our Lord Jesus Christ was here as a dependent Man, He, the Son, lived on account of the living Father: and now He Himself is the Source of life for us: we live on account of Him; as He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." He lived because of the living Father: we live because of Him. It must be remembered that though this new life is ours through His death, yet He Himself is the Same, yesterday, and today, and for ever. Yesterday He was upon earth in humiliation; today He is glorified in heaven. His royal throne shall be for ever and ever: but He is Himself always the Same: His circumstances may be changed, but not Himself: He changes not. He came near to us in grace that we might be able to appropriate Him. He is the living Bread which came down out of heaven. It was there before it came down; but He came in the only way that this living Bread could become ours--as a Man; and He said, "He that eats this Bread shall live for ever" (v. 58). Yes, mark it well. "LIVE FOR EVER!" We "live" now, and shall continue to "live" eternally. The wicked will not "live" for ever in the sense of this scripture: they exist for ever, in a place and condition called the second "death." The fathers even "did eat manna" and died: but mark the emphatic contrast which the Lord emphasizes in this verse. The one who eats this living Bread from heaven, unlike the fathers, receives a life therefrom that knows no death. The silver chord may be snapped: the earthen vessel may be broken: the tent may be taken down: the physical system may be dissolved by mortality and corruption, the life, however, which is now ours cannot be dissipated, it survives triumphantly all changes; for Christ Himself is our life; and we live because of Him who is eternally the same.

Before He came out of heaven, His recorded word said, "I am Understanding" (Prov. 8:14); and we are told, "Understanding is a wellspring of life to him that has it" (Prov. 16:22). We made our beginning in this when we were brought to the fear of the Lord. All that hate Him love death: but whoso finds Him finds life (Prov. 8:35). He is now found, thank God, by those who sought Him not, as Isaiah foretold (Rom. 10:20). He sought and saved us when we were wandering in the wild wastes of sin and folly. He is now our salvation: He is our life: and He makes us to hear the words of life. Those words, eaten and digested,

become a living energy within us; for wisdom and understanding are ours thereby. One of old said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them." His words are spirit and life: they flow from Him who is the Fountain of life: the wellspring of true vitality. His fruit too is sweet to our renewed taste: He is the Tree planted by the living streams--the Tree of life. If it is always true, "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life," it can be said in the highest sense of our blessed Lord; for His vital words are used with wisdom. "The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright" (Prov. 15:2). May we have grace and faith, in the power of the Spirit, to take in those words; to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, for our spiritual understanding.

The Book of Proverbs, which speaks of our blessed Lord as Wisdom, abounds with that which would direct the spiritual concerning the energies of life; although the book primarily may be said to give guidance for the earthly life. How significant are such words as these: "The law of the wise is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death" (Prov. 13:14). Truly the teaching of Christ keeps in healthy and happy vitality, free from the lethal influences of the world. Again, "In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death" (12:28). As we have seen, righteousness and life go together; the believer is in the path of righteousness, and the living Bread is provided there for him. So it is also said, "Righteousness tends to life" (11:19); also, "the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that wins souls is wise" (11:30); for there are results in the blessing of others through this living energy when it is rightly directed. So again we read, "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life" (10:11): life-giving communications flow from him. This was pre-eminently true of the blessed Lord.

We are further told, "He is in the way of life that keeps instruction" (10:17); and we are warned against the world's way of death; against the subtleties of the strange woman. "Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them" (5:6). Nevertheless, "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his goings" (5:21). The goings of the seducer leads to death and to hell. Therefore it may be earnestly said to any soul in danger, Listen not to her words, though they drop like honey, and her lips be smoother than oil! Heed the words of Wisdom! Let the words of life, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, enter into thine ears! Let them sink down into thine heart! For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. It is the report from God which His words bring to you! "Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them" (4:21). It is with the heart man believes to righteousness; and "out of the heart are THE ISSUES OF LIFE" (4:23).

Therefore "take fast hold of instruction, let her not go: keep her, for she is thy life" (4:13). Christ's words are spirit and life indeed!

We have said that the living Bread came out of heaven: that it was there necessarily before it came out: that, to bring it within our reach, Christ became Man: also that His death was necessary before this living Bread could be ours. Now, in Christ, we may feed in faith upon it bountifully, thanks to our God. Oh that our appetite for it might be increased! Oh that our appropriation of this food from heaven might be more abundant! Oh that our appreciation of its divine character might be enlarged, so as to produce from our hearts liberal thanksgivings to God for His unspeakable gift! He has bestowed upon us the best of heaven! The fatness of His house, the wealthy provision of it, the exalted preciousness of it, the Bread of God, are now ours! The Corn of heaven, the Bread of the mighty. What royal grace! What marvellous love to such as we!

Eight things are said concerning this new and living Bread which has been so bountifully given:

It is True: My Father gives you the true Bread (John 6:32).

It is Living: Jesus said, I am the living Bread (John 6:51).

It is Life-giving: Jesus said, It gives life to the world (John 6:33).

It is Life-sustaining: He said, I am the Bread of life (John 6:48).

It is Satisfying: The eater shall never hunger (John 6:35).

It is Enduring: That which endures unto life eternal (John 6:27).

It is Divine: The Bread of God which gives life (John 6:33).

It is Heavenly: The Bread from, or out of, heaven (John 6:41).

As we meditate upon the wealthy and profound import of these blessed words, all finding their measureless meaning in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ: as we thankfully consider the moral and vital opulence of these riches, which still surpass our limited comprehensions, in their divine, heavenly, true, life-giving and life-sustaining reality, we may well relieve our adoring hearts by singing the praises of Him who has made these things ours.

And it is because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, that we are enabled to take in these vital truths in measure. The natural man cannot do so. The flesh profits nothing: it is the Spirit which quickens. As we feed upon Christ, we shall build up a healthy spiritual constitution; and know how to leave alone that which is not of Him: not in a mere captious spirit; for there will be the desire that others should share in the blessedness of eternal life. The Jewish religious spirit wanted bread for themselves alone; but when Christ gave His flesh, it was for nothing less than "the life of the world" (6:51). Therefore out of the believer on the Son is to flow rivers of living water, as we are told in John 7:38. There is vital fruitfulness in the blessing of others, as we abide in Him. And again, we are told in chapter 4, there is not only a fountain of living water in the believer, satisfying his own heart, so that he shall never thirst for ever; but there is the upspringing of life to the divine Source; and worship flows from the heart to the Father in spirit and in truth.

Truly the blessed Lord said, "He that comes to Me shall never hunger, and he that believes on Me shall never thirst at anytime" (6:35 N.Tr.). Inward satisfaction for our own hearts: outward overflow also for others; and upward worship to the Father: all in living energy by the Spirit, because of our blessed Lord and Saviour, our living Food, to whom be eternal praise.

"He freely gives, 'tis all His own,

The Spirit's goodly fruit

Praise, issuing forth in life, alone

Our living Lord can suit."

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