

Promise of Life Titus 1

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the promise of eternal life in Christ, emphasizing its implications for believers living in a fallen world.

Scripture: Titus 1:2

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the promise of eternal life that God had in mind for humanity before the foundation of the world, highlighting that this life is embodied in Christ. He explains how, despite the corruption and evil that has entered the world, the divine life is communicated to believers through the preached word of truth. Darby stresses the importance of understanding our identity in Christ and living out this eternal life, which is characterized by godliness and a relationship with God. He encourages believers to recognize their position in Christ and to manifest this life in a world that has turned away from God. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the eternal life promised to us, which is now revealed through Jesus Christ.

Transcript

It is at the beginning of this chapter that the Spirit of God marks with an especial character that on which I desire to speak - the eternal thought of God towards us which we find in verses 2, 3. Evil had come in, the Spirit takes notice of it, and the effect in a most remarkable way is to throw us back on the whole mind and thought of God from the beginning. As evil progresses and corruption comes in, the apostle turns back to the origin of all, and coming from the divine nature itself (and all that could meet the evil, and convey us on, must come from that); that is, the eternal life which God who cannot lie promised before the ages of time; that which was in the mind of God as to the thing itself before the foundation of the world; that which God had in His mind, the counsel of God for us, before itself was created. It just shews us what we are, and what man is, with and apart from that eternal life.

In Ephesians we find it in connection with Christ (chap. 3:3-7): a mystery hidden through all ages in God until Christ was raised up as Head of the body, the bride. It is not on this I would dwell. I am not going to speak about the church, but would turn back to what the life is and would dwell on this thought, the promise of life in the mind of God before the world began. Before that, I say, this life existed in a Person, Christ, the One who was in the beginning with God and was God; that is the Christ with whom my life is hidden with the Father. Being in Himself life, He came into the world as the life and manifested the life.

The thing was embodied in the Person of the Lord as Man, and there it was, the life of man, not of angels: that which was specially God's divine thought towards man is shewn out when Christ becomes Man, and this life is communicated to us, the instrument used being the preached word of truth. This divine life had been manifested here in a man - the Lord Jesus. He having given it to us, it is now manifested in our bodies. It has the character of godliness in its manifestation. It tells you what you are. It is in a poor vessel and where there is a wretched will, but it tells you what you are and what the world is; it throws out an additional light to shew what man is, as a creature totally departed from God.

365 Morally speaking, the world has grown up in departure from God: that is, this world we live in - all that we see around - has sprung up from the creature having got away from God, but the life we have existed before the creation of the world, and this portion of Scripture is very full of the simple, quiet blessedness of what that life is, practically manifested and given in Christ. A great deal of evil had come in. Satan was corrupting the truth by the wild reasoning of man's mind. The apostle specially warns Timothy and Titus, and throws them back, not on common Christian profession, but on the faith of God's elect, the acknowledging the truth which is after godliness. They were to be as those who knew what were the thoughts and mind of God and were cast on Him. If I have got divine teaching, I can say, I know the Shepherd's voice, and if it is not His, I shall know that too. The truth which is after godliness is not only acknowledged, but is marked and stamped as of God by a man living to and for God. Godliness is what a man would do if instigated by God; and what a man would not do if God were close by him, it is clear, would certainly not be for God. A man daily taught by the knowledge of God how to be living for God would do everything to manifest the ways of godliness, knowing those ways because of knowing God. I speak not of doing right instead of wrong or of conscientiousness. A believer clearly ought to be righteous with regard to others; but I speak of godliness. You never can be for God without knowing what God is. I cannot walk worthy of God if I do not know Him. I cannot walk with God without that, though I may walk uprightly with man. Here it is walking worthy of God, the loins being girded (affections tucked up). This applies to all revealed to us in Christ. A believer, as to his motives and life, has Christ's mind revealed to him, to shew him how to guide himself through all circumstances. Christ was always Himself, never guided by circumstances. Sorrow could draw out His heart in divine love, but in motives and all circumstances He was always Himself (perfect, of course). It is the mind of Christ that believers are to have.

What a wonderful place we have got! Only as we are taught of God can we get hold of this, that is, the hope of eternal life promised by God before the world began, mark that; for as to the Adam life, it never could be that, but a divine life in those who are saved, a life for heaven; we have got it now, and we shall be there on account of it; there will be its full manifestation, everything there, every word, and all praise will be according to the presence of God; as participators of the divine nature we shall be in fullest blessedness, there where nothing inconsistent with the divine nature can exist, but everything will be in accordance with that life and ourselves as possessors of it in the highest and most blessed perfection. We belong to that place now, whilst our bodies are down here; the life we have got came down from thence, and has its only full sphere of blessing there.

366 The promise of God before the world began, this life was in the mind of God for us before ever the world existed. I do not speak now of predestination, but of the thing itself in the mind of God, before ever the world existed. If we turn to 1 John 1, we see how this life came down (v. 1-3) - "What our hands have handled, of the Word of life." It is a real man. The life which was with the Father was manifested down here in the Person of Christ. In many you will find great vagueness of thought in connection with this life. It is Christ Himself. "When he who is our life," etc. Before He speaks of the communication of life, He speaks

of its manifestation. John could see what it was down here, amongst friends and enemies; he says, "We have looked upon, and our hands," etc. The life which was with the Father is the life promised before the world began. I get what it is perfectly displayed. I see this life in One who, in due time, fully manifested it as man. The second Adam is the Man in whom its perfection is seen; a Man in this world, in all points tempted like us; a perfect Man, without sin, walking in the world in meekness and holiness, a pattern set before us to follow.

2 Timothy 1:9 shews the way it was given us in Christ. God connects the two things here: saved by Christ according to His own purpose and grace given us in Him before the world began. In this life we see a thing that has its display in heaven. We have got it now, and in a place where it is hindered. It leads my thoughts and feelings to be ever in heaven, where it is as before the world began. Though displayed in all perfection down here by Him who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light, the life was in heaven before it was manifested here. Wonderful truth!

For in the power of this life Christ has gone through death and annulled it. Death is an abolished thing for saints. It takes us out of all the misery of the first Adam. It was not so with saints in the Old Testament; they could not say, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." It was all death to them. Elijah was taken away for a testimony without passing through death, but Christ passed through it and annulled it rose and went up to heaven, and life and immortality are thus brought to light. Turn to John 1:1, "In him was life." You never could say that of a saint. God gave us to have that life in His Son; if in ourselves we might lose it, but if He is my life, I cannot. "He that hath the Son hath life."

367 He is the life and light of men, not of angels. This is an unutterably humbling truth for us. If God was exercising life-giving power, it was to be manifested in a man, and therefore the Son of His love becomes man. God displayed it by the incarnation of the Word - the eternal Son. He was given in promise to us before the world existed; and He came into the world personally. The Word, made flesh, dwelt among men in all the circumstances in which we walk. He goes down into the death of the first Adam, and abolishes death brings life and incorruptibility to light, and goes up to the right hand of God, as the display of this life in a man up there, What a thought! That eternal life in this world - a man, a poor man, a carpenter, one who had not where to lay His head. The life, promised before the world began, now has been made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and in due time manifested to those who believe, through preaching. Christ Himself is the great firstfruits of the life that we, as saved ones, have in Him - He the firstfruits of the great harvest of God. I repeat, this life, given in promise before the world was, was manifested by the Christ, who in the power of it passed through death; and in heaven it is now manifested in the risen Man Christ Jesus, while down here it is manifested in those who believe through preaching.

That is how we get it. It is preached in the world now and what does the world make of it? That is the solemn thing for your consciences. If we take the world, we get not the second Adam but the first. Turn back to the garden of Eden, and you get the clue to the present state of the world and how it began. Man, created in responsibility to keep his first estate, was commanded not to eat the fruit of a certain tree; he eats it, doing his own will, and is cast out of paradise; and the world begins where paradise ends; and that is the world we live in, only it is a thousand times worse, because it has rejected Christ. Yes! the world around us sprang up when man was driven from paradise; a man, in a state of responsibility, departed from God, made the world what it is; and what a world! Solemn as is the responsibility of man in it, for us who have life it is only by the bye; true, we have to go through it, but it has nothing to do with the eternal life we have except as being the place where the eternal life has been manifested and brought to us. I would ask, What is man, departed from God, about? Making the world a scene of delights for himself by

cultivating the arts and sciences. (You will find amongst the heathen the most beautiful exhibition of the arts and sciences.) I repeat man is making a scene for developing and displaying faculties that have nothing to do with God (the best as well as the worst have nothing to do with Him). Well, it is in this world that the eternal life has been and is manifested now. Is it by first mending and reforming man, by setting the world right, that God gives eternal life? Is life to be got by reforming the world, by modifying the evil of the ways and the tastes of man away from God, by improving man first without God?

368 What is man? A responsible being that has never been lost? A responsible being, I repeat, away from God, and in departure from God, he has built up for himself a world without God. Bring God into all the fine things that man is doing, and what would be the effect? Most of us know it as a matter of fact, that this world, with all its pleasures, and things delightful to the flesh, does not let God in, nor Christ, who is the eternal life; and I get it as a thing that comes in between. Eternal life has come down here, and I have it in a world that has all its life from the first man; in a world entirely departed and alienated from God; a world that had its origin in man having been turned out of paradise; a world that when Christ, in divine beauty and grace, was in it, spat in His face and turned Him out. That is the world I am in now.

But where does my heart go to out of the world? To that blessed life I have in Christ. I may have got it but yesterday, but the thing I have received was up there for me before the foundation of the world. I have got Christ as my life - the life I live is "by faith of the Son of God"; and it was in God's mind to give me this life before the world was. "He that hath the Son hath life" - a life not of man at all; and having got it I am to shew what is the effect of it, and from whence I got it. What is the life I got from the first Adam? All sin; if put under law, not subject to it; a life with lusts and a will of its own. I judge it altogether. When Christ was here, the tree being bad, had judgment pronounced against it. The flesh is a judged thing: I find only sin and condemnation in connection with it, but I get God dealing with this sin in the flesh - "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

369 Mark, it is not only sins remitted but sin condemned. Oh! I say, sin is in the flesh, I have got it, and I hate it. It is lusting in me, making me dislike what Christ likes whilst my heart is set on Christ. But I find God has dealt in judgment with it, and put it away on the cross. He condemned it where it was put away, and that is where I find I am. I have sin, but I am not to be judged for it - Christ was made sin for me, etc. He, in grace, has taken it. My soul in the power of this truth gets perfect peace. I have no more conscience of sins; I am no longer dreading God's judgment because I am forgiven: all has merged into the deliverance Christ has given. I have perfect liberty; sin has not dominion. I judge this flesh of mine and all its lusts and will entirely, because it is a judged thing - I am crucified with Christ. I stand in a new condition. I have eternal life in me, Christ being my life; I have liberty and joy, by His going through death. I have died and am risen with Him. This is where I am brought.

I have not only a life of him that departed from God, but as a believer the life of Him who came into the place where I was away from God, to bring me back to God. I belong to Him - I am risen with Him, where the eternal life is to be displayed. In spirit I am up there now, whilst in the body waiting for Him to come. I am in a world that is merely by the bye to me, only a thing I have to pass through - not of it, even as Christ was not. He passed through it, and left us an example that we should follow, walking in His footsteps. I am to reckon myself dead. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, even so," etc. A believer does not belong to the first Adam, but to the Second. The life of Christ is his, and that is all he owns as his life - that life so blessed, so divine, that the world would not have it, and shrunk from it because it was so perfect,

and God took it up and put it on His throne as the only place fitted for it.

370 Christ down here displayed everything that characterises this life. I should like to mark one or two traits of it: one is that quiet confidence with God that springs from, and is the fruit of, divine love, that which can trust God and is capable of enjoying blessed communion with God, enabling one through all things and circumstances here to walk on confiding in God. One could not have had that confidence if Christ had not died to put away sin and brought me into relationship with God. Having a purged conscience, I can delight in God, and as regards my walk through this world, Christ is my life, my all. I am consciously dependent on Him. As we pass on through the world we have to overcome. How? This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Life has this especial character. It avoids evil and walks in grace through the world. If I have the life of Christ, I am to walk down here as He walked, in practical life, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord," etc., with the consciousness that it came from God, promised before the world was.

We shall most surely find defectiveness in this from not having self judged and the spirit free to enjoy Christ. We have to watch that things of this world do not narrow up the life that is to be made manifest. Do we not continually find that we get under the power of circumstances, by which the heart is often narrowed? How often we have to say, I did not think of that at the right moment! But if always bearing about the dying of the Lord, it would be always easy to manifest His life. If the heart be full of Christ, it will be always ready for Christ. The tendency of saints is to have the heart narrowed up - never ready for God and their neighbour. It would not be so if we could only get the heart exercised under a deep consciousness of what the life we have got is, and what the world is, what a poor little wretched thing it is. Having hearts exercised to discern good and evil whilst down here, we should pass through this world as pilgrims and strangers, having cleansed consciences able to judge the flesh as being only the old thing. Life being given, the world (grown up from man rejecting God) is the place where this life is to be exercised, and we get various exercises. See what Paul passed through, "We who live are always delivered unto death," etc. He gloried in tribulation and in infirmities if only the life might be manifested. I desire that your hearts should get hold of what this eternal life is, so to live in the power of it, that you should see how it came into the world, revealed in Christ.

371 Seeing all its blessedness and beauty in Christ, the heart clings round it. In Him the life was the light of men. What a thing - in the place where Satan rules to have God's own life given to us in His Son, and that we live in Christ only, but ever remember that this life has no affinity with the world! We have to manifest the light of life in the midst of the world that will not have Christ; and, alas! how constantly everything tends to make us live by sight instead of by faith! But whatever we fail in we shall certainly find that God has given us everything in Christ.

Oh, may He give us to know more and more what that eternal life is which was promised in Him before the world began.

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