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THE DWELLING PLACE

"... dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2 Cor.6:9-10).

To know that one is living on borrowed time can be a revolutionizing experience. Whether this knowledge comes from a revelation from God or from the unanimous voice of medical science, the knowledge of imminent death can be a sobering thing. To know that life hangs from a slender thread, that it is but a flickering flame in the wind, can deeply tint one's relationships and have a profound effect upon life.

For the deeply committed Christian, the sentence of death need not cast the pall of gloom upon him. Paul said, "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God, WHO RAISETH THE DEAD..." (2 Cor.1:9).

"We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." (Rom.8:36). At any day we may be pulled out of the flock and sacrificed on the altar of God's will! This knowledge in Paul elicited his glorious confession of faith.

Writing to his spiritual son Timothy, Paul confides, "For I am now ready to be offered (as a sacrifice), and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim.4:6-8).

The Psalmist David spoke of walking through "the valley of the shadow of death." In his famous Shepherd's psalm, we read "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." The awareness of the presence of God broke the power of fear over him.

In Psalm 91, the writer speaks of the secret place of refuge. I recently saw this Scripture in such a new light. It says, "He who dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Ps.91:1).

Not the SHADOW OF DEATH; but IN THE SHADOW OF THE PROTECTING LOVE OF GOD!
Under His WINGS, in the shadow of His hand!

I have learned that this shadow is not a fearful place but a place of rest from the heat of the day.

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Afraid? Of what?
To feel the spirit's 'glad release?
To pass from pain to perfect peace,
The strife and strain of life to cease?
Afraid -- of what?

E. H. Hamilton ⁽¹⁾

This secret place of the Most High also assures us deliverance from the trap that is laid for our feet. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler..." (Ps.91:3). We need not fall prey to the wiles of the devil.

We can overcome the fear of the ravages of disease that slowly waste away the body. "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor FOR THE PESTILENCE that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." (Ps .91:5-6).

Death has no power over us because its sting is gone.

Jesus causes us to triumph over our enemy. He said: "Because I live, YE SHALL LIVE ALSO." (Jn.14:19).

Life comes out of death! Christianity came out of the empty tomb! From the dungeon Joseph ascended to the throne (Gen. 40). Fruitfulness comes after sowing. The seed lies under the suffocating earth, till it bursts forth from its prison into new abundant life.

What we hold on to, we lose; what we keep is what we are willing to give away.

Do not hold on to life; relinquish it into the hands of Him who is the source. Holding it, kills it. As a child squeezes a small chick tightly to its breast, until it has taken its life, so we can lose true life when we will not let it go. Yielding brings blessing.

Giving we receive, dying we live. Jesus said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (Jn.12:24).

As there is a new birth of the SPIRIT when we are born into the Kingdom of God, likewise there is a new birth that the SOUL must know, if one's life is to be completely fruitful. The soul with all its selfish desires hinders the working of the life of God through us. The sentence of death is upon us. Accept it, and from the ashes there will come forth a life that is truly victorious, which cannot die.

Nature obeys this law instinctively. We learn it by revelation. Knowing that time is short and life is but a vapor should cause us to "redeem the time," to buy up every opportunity, for soon we shall all stand before the King of kings.

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David prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (Ps.90:12).
Do not count the days but make every day count!

To some, it is the certainty of death that frees them to really live. To others, it is the conviction of the nearness of the Second Coming of Christ.

I am convinced that there is nothing that can give meaning to life and purify one's motives, as the certainty of the nearness of the end. We are admonished to "Watch, therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matt. 24:42).

Referring to the "Blessed Hope" of the Second Coming of Christ, John said, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." (1 Jn.3:3).

We generally tend to think of the Second Coming as somewhere out there in the future. Theologically we know it is very near, and yet we reason, not today! But Jesus said, "For in such an hour as YE THINK NOT the Son of Man cometh." (Matt.24:44). He MAY come today or your life may be snatched away today. What if it were today!

The words of our text have taken on new meaning to me: "AS DYING AND BEHOLD WE LIVE!"

The worldly say, "AS LIVING and behold we die!" But the true Christian can say, "As dying, AND BEHOLD WE LIVE!" Life is not vanquished by death, but death is swallowed up by life!

The emphasis is on the latter part of the phrase, "BEHOLD WE LIVE." It is LIFE with a new and profound meaning! It is LIFE WALKING WITH GOD such as Enoch had, who by faith walked into eternity!

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." (Heb.11:5).

Suddenly, more than ever, we want to PLEASE Him, and every act or word we speak becomes sacramental. We tread carefully when we know that each footprint left behind us is our last; we shall never walk this way again! "Goodness and mercy all my life, shall surely follow me, and in God's house for evermore, my dwelling place shall be." ⁽²⁾

"There is no death, though eyes grow dim, there is no night, when I'm near to Him!" ⁽³⁾

And then the apostle says, "AS SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING!"

True rejoicing does not come from uncontested happiness, nor from idealistic circumstances, but from the ashes of sorrow.

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"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." It was not the joy of the RELEASE from pain, but the joy of the release from the FEAR of pain, that Paul knew.

It was the JOY of the LORD that cannot be extinguished by darkness. The darkness of despair can put out all human joys. It is joy that has been resurrected that can triumph in the night!

The writer to the Hebrews tells us: "... After ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions..." (Heb.10:32).

We wonder sometimes, why this is so. Why the ecstasy and joy of our first encounter with Christ should be so easily taken from us?

Here we have a ray of light on this question: "That no man should be moved by these afflictions; for ye yourselves know that WE ARE APPOINTED TO THESE THINGS." (1 Thess.3:3). Disappointment is God's appointment! From the death of crushed dreams comes the life that is everlasting. And from the depths of personal loss and sorrow, comes the rejoicing that enriches the heart.

O Joy that seekest me thro' pain.
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow thro' the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to hide from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

George Matheson ⁽⁴⁾

In Numbers 31:23 we read, "Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean." Peter said, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but REJOICE, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings..." (1 Pet.4:12-13). We rejoice not in the fire but in the fellowship of His suffering that is the result.

It is the fire of testing that purifies the gold, "... that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth (eternal things are faith, hope and love), though it be tried with fire, might be found unto PRAISE and honour and glory (when?) at the appearing of Jesus Christ..." (1Pet.1:7, parenthesis added).

Samson gave a riddle that baffled his enemies. "Out of the eater came forth food, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judges 14:14). It was from the carcass of the angry lion that had

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viciously attacked him, that food came. It was from the powerful beast that he had been able to overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit, that honey was formed.

GOD PUTS HIS HONEY BEES IN VERY UNLIKELY PLACES !

Your victory over temptation and despair will one day yield food and sweetness.

Often returning from Timnath,
The Christian now homeward bound,
Turns off from the dusty roadside
Where the place of spoil is found,
And humbly gathers sweetness
Where his roaring flesh once died,
Enough for himself and others,
From a carcass bleached and dried.

John Wright Follette ⁽⁵⁾

AS HAVING NOTHING AND YET POSSESSING ALL THINGS.

Paul had nothing that he could call his own. All the things that were formerly gain to him, he counted loss for Christ. "Yea doubtless", he said, "...and to count them but refuse, that I may win Christ..."! (Phil.3:8).

It is when Christ is our life, and "to live is Christ", then and then alone, can we be truly rich and possess those things that are eternal for which we have been apprehended. We can possess the gates of our enemies when we do not count our life dear to ourselves. Paul was able to win Christ, and to win that incorruptible crown because he had become the bondsman of Jesus Christ.

HE HAD NOTHING THAT DID NOT BELONG TO HIS MASTER, BUT ALL THINGS THAT BELONGED TO HIS MASTER WERE HIS !

AS POOR, YET MAKING MANY RICH !

As his Master, Paul was poor. He sewed tents to support himself. And yet from this sacrificial life of abnegation there has flowed unceasingly for nearly two thousand years an enriching river of revelation!

AS SORROWFUL, yet ALWAYS REJOICING !

Paul wrote from his cell, "Rejoice... AND AGAIN I SAY REJOICE!" (Phil.4:4). Why? The Lord is at hand! Our deliverance is nearer than when we first believed. Sorrow lasts the night; Joy comes in

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the morning.

In Hebrew's 13:15, we read, "Let us offer the SACRIFICE OF PRAISE to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name."

The burnt sacrifice to God in the Old Testament, was to be without blemish. The lamb was not to be blind or lame or diseased. We should not mix our praise with grumblings and complainings! The same mouth should not pour out both bitter and sweet water.

God led the children of Israel through the desert for forty years until all the unbelieving complainers were left bleaching in the wilderness. Of that generation, only those two spies, Joshua and Caleb who believed and gave a good report, entered into the promised land. The principle remains the same today. God will lead us around in circles until we learn to give thanks IN all things. Then our prisons will be turned into BETHELS and our deepest pain becomes our greatest gain!

Of Jesus it is written that on the night on which He was betrayed, "He took the cup, and gave thanks..." (Luke 22:17). Even though it symbolized His life's blood, yet He was enabled to give thanks!

We, as New Testament priests, have a sacrifice to offer to God. It is: The fruit of our lips, our sacrifice of praise. It costs to praise! It is a sacrifice well pleasing to God when we offer thanks in adversity.

It is easy enough to be pleasant,
When life flows by like a song,
But the man worth while is one who will smile,
When everything goes dead wrong.
For the test of the heart is trouble,
And it always comes with the years,
And the smile that is worth the praises of earth
Is the smile that shines through tears.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox ⁽⁶⁾

Praise is to be offered CONTINUALLY! Like an eternal flame upon the altar of our dedication, the flame rising from our bodies, laid on that altar as a living sacrifice unto Him. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1).

We read in 1 Thes.5:18, "IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS."

John Bunyan made a flute from the leg of his stool while in Bedford prison. When his jailer came to

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stop him from playing on his strange instrument, he slipped it back in its place in his stool. May God help us to turn our prison stools into an instrument of praise!

The joy of the Lord is an unquenchable thing. It is like a spring, that flows fresh and pure from the mountain heights.

IT CAN BE DEFILED AT ITS BASE, BUT NEVER AT ITS SOURCE !

The Lord is the Keeper of the spring, and He tends it, and removes the defilement that would clog it, so that it can continue to flow unhindered to the waiting multitudes.

The redeeming effect of the Spiritual Christian in this world is a clear result of the Joy of the Lord. Without it, not only our lives are barren, but those to whom we minister are left in an arid desert. The water of Life is to flow from the Spirit-filled believer. We should be the channels of God's vitalizing life. The world has no other source. The polluted springs of this world can spew out only pollution. It is the salt of Christian dedication poured into the stream of humanity, that can heal the fountain.

We may not be able to give thanks FOR all things. That would be unwise; but we can give thanks IN all things. In six out of seven translations, the word is translated IN. I believe that this is the mind of the Spirit, otherwise we would make God a partner in evil and in suffering. He came to give life and healing, not to bring pain or suffering or death. But we can give thanks IN all things, "And we know that ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD to them that love God." (Rom.8:28).

Give thanks as well, for those who have generously shown the love of God to us. See them as channels and instruments of the pure love that flows from God to us -- from His heart, through their hands and lips, into our needy souls.

Fred Arnot, the great missionary of Central Africa, wrote in his diary, "I am learning never to be disappointed but to praise."

The attitude of THANKFULNESS will be the soil from which praise can grow. Ungratefulness is the soil from which all depravity springs.

Writing to the Romans, Paul lists the results of human depravity. He says, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents; without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." (Rom.1:29-31). But the reason he states for this moral corruption is ingratitude and self-centeredness. He states, "... they are without excuse; because, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful." (Rom. 1:20-21).

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God found in St. Paul a clear channel through which to pour Himself forth into the stream of human need. As Paul expressed it, "So then death worketh in us, but life in you." (2 Cor.4:12).

A poured out life is an abundant life. A flowing stream enriches the land through which it flows. The farmers draw from it to irrigate their fields. A dead, stagnant, selfish sea, gives life to nothing, but creates an atmosphere of death all around it. Fragrant, fresh, vitalizing breezes come from a life that is poured forth in sacrifice.

It is written of our Master, "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich!" (2 Cor.8:9).

Those who have gone down to death can minister life. Those who have experienced and won over sorrow can rejoice and minister comfort to others.

From the carcass of the vanquished lion can come honey to sweeten the lives of all who pass by.

Jesus said, "Give and it shall be given unto you." (Luke 6:38).

The gift that counts is the gift that costs. Giving from the depth of poverty is the gift that enriches.

As dying, and yet gloriously alive;

As bereft of all things, yet incalculably rich;

Suffering the loss of all things corruptible, but left with Christ!

And from the ashes there comes forth the beauty of conformity to the Divine Image.

From the heart of Thomas à Kempis came this prayer: ⁽⁷⁾

O, to be nothing,

To possess nothing,

To desire nothing, BUT THEE !

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⁽¹⁾ "Afraid" by E. H. Hamilton

Poems that Preach compiled by John R. Rice

Published by "Sword of the Lord Foundation", Murfreesboro Tennessee.

⁽²⁾ Hymn "The Lord's my Shepherd"

Crowning Glory Hymnal, compiled by John W. Peterson

published by Singspiration Inc. Zondervan Publishing House Grand Rapids, Michigan.

⁽³⁾ Song "I walk with God", from The Student Prince.

⁽⁴⁾ Hymn "O Love that Wilt not let me Go", by George Matheson

Crowning Glory Hymnal, compiled by John W. Peterson

published by Singspiration Inc. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

⁽⁵⁾ Broken Bread by John Wright Follette

published by Gospel Publishing House, Springfield Missouri.

⁽⁶⁾ "Worthwhile" by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Poems that Preach compiled by John R. Rice

Published by "Sword of the Lord Foundation" Murfreesboro Tennessee.

⁽⁷⁾ Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Jesus Christ.