

From Death to Life

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John 5: 24: Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, our Father in Heaven! We come here to worship you, honor you and to praise you. We express our deep gratitude in delivering us from the darkness of sin and death to the true light of Jesus Christ and for making us Your children. We earnestly pray that You delight to be in and amongst us today in this congregation. May your Spirit overwhelm us so that we hear Your voice in genuine spirit of humility and contriteness when You speak through the poor lips of this unworthy servant. And if there is any souls in our midst who have not yet Your salvation in them, may Your Spirit draw them to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Grant Your grace and help to this congregation today. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

This one verse we read contains all of the essences of the Christian gospel message.

First of all, there is the declaration of Jesus to the hearers, *"Most assuredly I say unto you."* Gospel of Christ is a declaration of a very important message, a message of life and death so that the hearers must listen with utmost attention. That is why Jesus emphasized saying *"Most assuredly I say unto you."* King James Version says, *"Verily, verily I say unto you."* He used this expression to draw the attention of the audience to important messages He wished to deliver. So likewise, when God's servants take the gospel message to the world, the message is so very important and they stress the critical nature of the message as their Lord did.

"He who hears My word..." The Son of God came to this world as a human named Jesus and His disciple, John, in his gospel, chapter 1, described His Lord Jesus as the Word of God, the light of God and the true life.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. [John 1: 1~5]

Jesus became the Word of God both orally and through His living. God the Son is the embodiment of God's Word, so when we read the Scripture the words and life of Jesus Christ are embedded throughout the verses, chapters and books of the entire Bible. Unless we understand Jesus, know Him personally and have His mind in us in spirit, I'd say it is not possible to truly comprehend the Scripture. But, don't be concerned. Jesus will open our eyes to understand His words when we invite the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us.

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the

Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. [Luke 24: 44-45]

Jesus opened the eyes of His disciples to help them understand that Scriptures prophesied about Him had to be fulfilled through His life, death and resurrection. The event of the Son of God coming to this world was the greatest event that happened on earth. We can say perhaps it was an event greater in significance than the creation of the earth itself or the great flood in the days of Noah. You might say in your mind, “What does he mean? Why was the birth of one Jewish man more significant than the creation of the earth itself?”

We just read John 1: 3, “*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*”

Because all things including this earth were made through the Son of God and without Him nothing was created, God the Son was the creator who played an integral part in the creation together with God the Father and God the Spirit, who form the Triune God together.

This Son of God, who was God Himself, came to this world as a baby boy in the town of Bethlehem in Judea and grew up as a young man as the eldest child of the family of Joseph and Mary in the village of Galilee in northern Israel.

His humble birth and family background in the household of Joseph and Mary, who were both descendants of King David, certainly did not do justice to His true being as the Son of God. Yet, He did not demand it and lived a humble life. Doesn't it give us a strong message? It did to me when I listened to the gospel more than 50 years ago as a high school student. How could the Son of God be born and grow up in such a lowly, humble way--unrecognized, dishonored and deprived?

President Abraham Lincoln, whom we adore and respect as one of the greatest presidents of this nation, was born on February 12, 1809, in a one-room log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky; his family moved to southern Indiana in 1816. Lincoln's formal schooling was limited to three brief periods in local schools, as he had to work constantly to support his family. In 1830, his family moved to Macon County in southern Illinois, and Lincoln got a job working on a river flatboat hauling freight down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. After settling in the town of New Salem, Illinois, where he worked as a shopkeeper and a postmaster, Lincoln became involved in local politics as a supporter of the Whig Party, winning election to the Illinois state legislature in 1834. His humble beginning and rise to the nation's leadership at a time of fierce national debate which drove the nation to the civil war was perhaps according to God's will so that his presidency could be instrumental in delivering this great nation of America from the sin of slavery and disregard of human values so that, as he remarked in his address at Gettysburg, “that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” Looking back, we can certainly see this great man of a humble beginning was used by God in preserving not only the unity of our nation but the right spirit that respects the rights of all people.

Apostle Paul clarified this principle of God in using men of humble status to accomplish His will and plan as follows:

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of

the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. [I Corinthians 1: 27-29]

So when we sit under the sound of the gospel, we hear, through the lips of His messengers, the words of Jesus including the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, who is the true Word of God. You have come here well. The privilege of hearing the gospel message is very precious-- more precious than you can imagine. I say this for several reasons:

First, those Jewish people in the first century who were waiting for the redemption promised and prophesied by the prophets were waiting for the Messiah to come and to save them. Until Jesus came, although they could find solace in the Scriptures, such waiting souls' yearning could not be met.

Secondly, the word of God and His truth have been polluted by the Catholic Church so much so that those who sought to worship God according to the apostolic faith handed down from the apostles of Christ were much persecuted and deprived of the freedom to worship in spirit and in truth. According to a study the number of persecuted and martyred non-Catholic Christians number some 50 million people over the centuries. Through the dark ages it was very difficult to listen to true gospel being preached and practicing true faith was highly hazardous. We should be grateful today that we have the freedom to hear true word of God and to worship Him without fear of oppression and loss of life.

Thirdly, even in modern era since the 19th century strong waves of intellectual rationalism, atheistic scientism including evolutionism, and liberal humanism have penetrated into the fundamental churches and polluted the faith of loyal Christians and spread seeds of confusion and disruption so that we now have many denominations that teach gospel that is sometimes quite different from the gospel which was preached by the apostles of the first century. That is why it is a privilege to be able to listen to pure word of God's truth. It is my sincere prayer that the Lord God would help my insignificant ministry and poor lips to speak such words of truth without compromise, without hypocrisy but with true courage, grace and knowledge granted from His throne in heaven.

Now back to John 5: 24, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."*

How is it that those who hear His word and believe in God who sent Jesus into the world will have everlasting life? This sounds much like a promise of a magic -- Does He mean that we can live forever without dying if we believe in God? I can say I believe in God and really I do believe God exists. Then am I assured of eternal life if I confess my faith in God? What is the unexplained trick here? Aren't there some qualifying conditions before this magic can be effective in my life? And what is the nature of this everlasting life? Why did God make this design and what good does this bring to God if we believe in Him? These are some of the multitude of questions that rush into your heart when you read this verse thoughtfully. Right now you likely have half a dozen other questions in your mind regarding this verse. And it is all very good -- that you have these questions. The Scripture is there to provide answers to such questions.

Upon hearing Jesus' sermons many people came to Him with questions. Some, including His own disciples, had questions with genuine purpose of wanting to learn more of God's truth, while

Pharisees and Sadducees came to trick Jesus with questions that would cause Him to say things that could be used for accusation. However, Nicodemus, who was a learned Pharisee and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin, more like our Congress today, came to Jesus at night and received an effective educational session from Jesus about this eternal life and being born again.

When we read the Old Testament scripture, we see it is largely a historical track of how God endeavored to save His people and to mold them into His own people, family and bride. Some people believe that God gave up on the people of Israel and the New Testament church is God's people with the Jewish people left out. Some people modify this first belief by saying some Jews will be added to the New Testament church during the last days. We need to remember that God never relents on His plan of human salvation, which started from Adam and his family, down to Noah and his family, down to Abraham and his family, then to Isaac and his family, to Jacob and his twelve sons, who formed a nation when they were brought out of Egypt being led by Moses. God called this nation of Israel in the wilderness as His first fruits.

Israel was holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them," says the Lord.' [Jeremiah 2:3]

In other words, the people of Israel in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt was the first church of God here on the earth. Although the people of God often were unfaithful to God whoring after other gods, the Lord God in His great mercy and long-suffering sent prophets and spiritual leaders to bring them back to His fold. Because of their repeated disobedience, backslidings and betrayals to God, the divided nations of Israel and Judah were conquered and most of their peoples were led captive into foreign lands -- Israel by Assyria in BC 721 and Judah by Babylon in BC 586. Although most of them came back to their home land under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah some 70 years plus later and rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, they were again conquered by the army of Alexander of Greece in BC 323 and later by the Roman Empire, which made Israel a colony ruled by a puppet king, Herod and supervised by a Roman general as the governor. This was the sad political picture of Israel when Jesus came to the world as the Messiah.

Because the situation of Israel under the repeated harsh colonial rules and oppression, when Jesus came, spoke powerful message of the gospel about the kingdom of God, and demonstrated supernatural powers such as feeding thousands of people with very little, walking on the water, healing sick people including leprosy, blindness and lameness, and raising dead persons to life, people, including those in power, looked up to Him to be the political or military Messiah who would remove the colonial bondage of the Roman Empire and bring freedom to the people. Indeed, such a picture of a powerful Messiah had been prophesied in the Scripture.

David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore. [Ezekiel 37: 24-28]

These verses we know refer to the thousand year rule in the Lord's Kingdom to be established on the earth when the Lord Jesus returns again. But the Jews of the first century and before believed this Servant figure, the Messiah, will bring about this prophesy of Ezekiel in their day and age. Therefore, when Jesus came of a humble status and preached an unseen kingdom of heaven that dwells in the hearts of men and women, the spiritual rebirth, submission to the colonial authorities and loving even their enemies, the Jewish religious leaders could not reconcile between the image of the Messiah, a powerful ruler who will bring about a powerful nation of Israel together with peace in the land and the meek image of a peaceful Rabbi from Galilee who was crucified on Calvary. This disparity of understanding is still with the Jewish religious leaders today so that Jesus has largely not been accepted by the Jewish people except a small minority who became so-called 'Messianic Jews.'

So God's plan of human salvation, which started from Adam and Eve and their children, is still going on. God the Son came as a human to show mostly the Jewish people in the first century how to live and come to know God. He drew the people, including the twelve disciples of humble origins like Himself, to Him to learn of Him and to make them His disciples. After three and a half years their faith was still shaky as Peter's example demonstrated. However, once they witnessed the resurrected Lord Jesus, they were converted into a band of witnesses whose faith was solidly grounded in their own personal experience of living and learning of their Master, who was God the Son. They went forth preaching the message of the gospel to all corners of the Roman Empire with such courage and conviction that they were not afraid of any obstacles and persecution. The work of God saw a bright day in the first few centuries.

I realize that this sermon has somehow turned into a history lesson. However, some historical perspective is necessary to put our faith on a correct perspective and sound understanding. That is why I am not bashful about providing some lessons from the history of Christianity to you to help you understand where we are today.

But we need to address the more fundamental question of why we humans need salvation and salvation from what? And what did Jesus accomplish in God's plan of human salvation?

You and I need to be saved from the fundamental human destiny of death if we are without God. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had perfect peace and blessings of God. God created human in the form and likeness of God Himself.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." [Genesis 1: 26-28]

Because man was created in the likeness of God man was created as a being here on earth with eternal life that knew no death. However, eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would surely bring death, so was Adam warned.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." [Genesis 2: 15-17]

Some people say that God tricked Adam and Eve into sinning. Friends -- I'd like you to know that God never uses trickery or schemes to cause us to fall. It was Satan who came in the form of a serpent and tricked Eve into eating the forbidden fruit by deceiving her.

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [Genesis 3: 4-5]

God created all things in harmony. God created all trees and herbs in the garden for man's consumption and enjoyment. But then God created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to help man appreciate all knowledge that man had the privilege of receiving from God. This tree with the consequence of certain death was a stark reminder that life could face death when man disobeys God. Instead of an instructional tool for man, Satan used it as a tool to cause humanity's fall. Today the Scripture should be used for man to understand who God is. But the enemies of God use the Scripture to cause separation of mankind from God as Satan did to the first couple.

God had not lied about the sure death of eating the forbidden fruit. When Adam and Eve sinned, certain genetic change occurred in their blood so that their bodies could no longer live forever, but had to decay towards their eventual death. The death cycle began with the first couple's fall as God had told them. And the first couple were driven out of the Garden of Eden after the fall.

It was not just those two people but all their descendants and the entire creation also suffered the fate of degradation and corruption. So grave was the consequence of the first couple's sin that the procession of depravity and death has been with the earth and with the entire humanity during the past six thousand years since God's creation. Apostle Paul expounded on this truth to the Christians in Rome as follows:

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. [Romans 8: 19-21]

An important question or two come to us at this point -- Did not God know that Adam and Eve would sin if He is all-knowing, all-powerful God? Why did He not prevent them from sinning?

The answers are, yes, He knew they would fall. And in His eternal grace and mercy He provided a way to bring them back to Eden and that way back is Christ the Son of God. You parents who have young children in the congregation would understand that when you let you little kids play in the back yard, they will come back crying when they fall. Mom sees the little boy's bleeding knee or the young daughter's bruised head, fixes them with gentle caring hands and comforts them. We do so because we have been created like God. We don't chastise them and lock them up to prevent them from playing ever again. Such is not our nature because there is love in us towards our children. Likewise God loves

His creation, especially the humans because He created us in His image and in His likeness. Do you believe that?

Friends, there is no other religion in this world where God has His own Son killed instead of sinners so that He could accept the sinners into His household. Other religions demand the believers to improve their own nature to reach the so-called Nirvana, where they can become gods or Buddha's. There was a Buddhist monk in Korea when I was growing up and he wanted to reach the state of Nirvana and he believed he could reach it if he could endure the pain of having one of his fingers burned. So he lighted a finger and endured the pain until that finger was burned up and he had one less finger in his body. Guess what happened? Nothing changed. He found his human nature the same --no improvement at all and he did not experience the elevated spiritual status of Nirvana at all. So he wrote a book about the futility of this Buddhist training.

Brothers and sisters -- God made it plain in the Scripture that He would give His salvation to all who believe on Jesus Christ. In the verse we read, John 5: 24, Jesus proclaimed that if you believe God who sent Jesus into the world, you will not be in God's condemnation but will move from death to life, everlasting life. Do you know what that promise means? It is God's promise of bringing us back to the Garden of Eden. Our faith in Christ Jesus will remove all barriers that keep us from going to God as our Father and having the Spirit of Christ dwelling inside of us, to guide us in our journey back to Eden, to comfort us in times of sorrow and need, to give assurance of the promise of this eternal life with God.

Brothers and sisters -- This promise is the essence of the gospel of Christ. Today if you feel the tug of God's spirit telling you to come to Jesus and to taste the peace and happiness you have not known in your life, do not hesitate to say 'yes' to Jesus. You now know why you did not have peace and happiness in your life. It is because we have been born with sin, we have been without God and we did not know Jesus. We have struggled on our own in this life, not knowing where to go, thinking that pursuing material gains and advances in our jobs are the ultimate goals of life.

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. [John 14: 27]

Now, say 'yes' to Jesus and let in the true peace of Jesus Christ rule in your heart and life. If you so accept Jesus into your heart and life, make Him your King and Lord, then God accepts you as His child, and you will transition from the fateful life of sin and deprivation into the blessed life as a child of God, freed from sin's condemnation into true life with Christ and God. This is the purpose we were born into this world, that we find our way back to Eden, where there is perfect peace and eternity with God.

Now, let us pray.

Oh Lord God our Father, we lift our voice to honor and worship you. We know that Your eyes are on this congregation today. We know that You are looking down into every soul gathered here and you are particularly interested in those whose hearts have been far from you, without peace and joy in life but remorse and regrets only. But we pray that You accept their cry as they submit their hearts to you saying 'yes' to Jesus, allowing Him to be their Lord and King. Lord God, accept them as Your children in Your mercy and grace. Grant them the gift of Your Spirit so that You visit them with complete healing of mind and soul, granting them the power to turn away from their past sinful life, and start walking the new journey heading back to Eden with Christ and His people. And may those who are already in Your

grace find it their mission to help these spiritual babes as their brothers and sisters, helping them in ways to encourage and strengthen them in our journey together.

We pray these all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.