

The Supreme Importance Of The Incorruptible

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I would like at the very outset to seek to put into two or three concise statements what I believe to be the Lord's object for this time.

In the first place, God is supremely concerned with ultimate and time-outlasting values. Then, He would have those values secured as directly and immediately as possible. Further, the effectiveness of a believer's life, and of the life of God's people together, is all a matter of the measure of intrinsic value; not of comparative or superficial, but of intrinsic value. And therefore, finally, it is a matter of primary importance that the Lord's people should recognise this and be committed to it. Now, probably these statements will take on significance as we move from chapter to chapter, and so it will be profitable if they are repeated from time to time; but I hope that the outstanding word in it has struck you - that you recognise that really what the Lord is after is intrinsic value, not comparative value, and that therefore He works with that object in view. Surely, if time is shortening, He will press that issue more and more closely.

Now will you turn with me to a passage of Scripture - 2 Timothy 1:8-10. We read this whole section because what we are after is included in it and is a part of it.

Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but suffer hardship with the gospel according to the power of God; Who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who abolished death, and brought life and immortality (Incorruption, A.R.V. margin) to light through the Gospel.

The clause which we take out as the key to our present consideration is this - "Who abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light", or, to cut that down still further - "life and incorruption".

The Great Issue Of Christ's Coming

This is a statement as to the grand issue of the coming into this world of the Lord Jesus; as to His life, His death, His resurrection. The one great issue here is stated to be the bringing to light of life and incorruption. That coming, that living, that dying, that being raised, had secured the substance of the Gospel, so the Apostle says here, and that Gospel brought to light that great issue. This whole great matter was brought to light by the Gospel. The issue of the preaching, of the proclaiming of the good news, was life and incorruption.

Logically, therefore, the conclusion is that, apart from that coming, that living, that dying, that rising, neither life nor incorruption would be known, nor would it be available. Some translations of the passage have the word "immortality" in place of "incorruption" - "life and immortality": an unfortunate translation for us, because "immortality" has taken on a much more general meaning in the minds of people than the word here allows. It is thought to mean continuance after physical death, survival after the life here; but, although the Bible teaches the survival of all after physical death, that all have to stand before the judgment seat after death, that is not what is meant by the word as it is used here and in several other places in the New Testament. The word here used is connected with several different things (if I may use that word 'things' for the moment).

In the first place it is used in connection with God. He is spoken of as "the incorruptible God" (Rom. 1:23). You would not put the word 'immortal' there in the place of "incorruptible", because you at once recognise that there is some element about incorruptibility that is more, and much more, than just eternal existence. He is the incorruptible God.

The word is used in connection with the Lord Jesus - "Neither wilt Thou give Thy Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). It was not possible that He should see corruption. The Lord Jesus had an incorruptible nature and life, and that meant that there was something there which conquered death. It was not just death suspended or put aside; there was some element that destroyed death. It was that incorruptible element.

The word is also used of the Blood of Christ. "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold... but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish" (1 Peter 1:18,19). You see, there is an element in incorruption that is extra.

It is also used of the glorified bodies of believers - "this corruptible must put on incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:53). That is related to glorification.

And once more it is used by the Apostle in relation to an incorruptible crown. "Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown" (1 Cor. 9:25). We know what that means - something that not merely fades and dies, but completely disintegrates, and becomes something very other than glorious. "But we an incorruptible" - the incorruptible crown means more than just survival, as of a flower that does not die, an everlasting flower. It is something with an extra element in it.

And that is the word that is used here: "Jesus Christ... abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel". It is the quality of the life, the inherent and intrinsic nature of the life that He has brought to light, that is the incorruptible thing. He ANULLED death, not just only non-existence, but destroying the essential nature of death which is corruption. Life and incorruption, in the way in which the Apostle links them here, are one thing. Incorruption is the nature of the life.

Effectiveness Dependent Upon Incorruption

What we are concerned with, then, at this time and you will suffer this preliminary laying down of foundations, because it is a very important thing to do - what we are really concerned with now is the one supremely important thing of being incorruptible. The thing of supreme importance is incorruption. As Christ's concentrated effectiveness depended upon certain spiritual factors, so it will be with us, and the factors upon which that concentrated effectiveness depended were the factors or features of incorruption - those things in the background or constitution of His life which were incorruptible things. It was those that gave to His life its tremendous, its immense, meaning.

What a great amount of intrinsic value was found in three and a half years. That is not much in a lifetime, especially when you are looking back on life. But just consider again all that those three and a half years contained. It has not only taken two thousand years to touch the very fringe of it: it will take all the ages of the ages to exhaust the content of those three and a half years. It is an inexhaustible fullness. From the baptism to the glorification there was a concentrated fullness of value capable of filling eternity. Men through all the centuries have been drinking at the fountain of those three and a half years, and they are still drinking - all nations, all classes, all languages - and it is as full as ever. It is still more full than all that has been taken out of it. How pregnant were the values of that brief spell of life here! What a seed plot for the whole universe! How could it be that so much should come out of so little? How could it be that for ever and ever afterward there should be this flowing of the mighty river of inexhaustible Divine values?

That is the question, and that is the question to which, I believe, at least to some extent, the Lord would give us an answer here; and I say again, it was because during those three and a half years that life was constituted upon incorruptible principles, incorruptible elements. While Jesus was the Son of God, and thus fundamentally, infinitely, different from us as regards Godhead and Deity, the New Testament makes it unmistakably clear that the features of an incorruptible life are to be reproduced and to reappear in His people; not the features of Deity or Godhead, but these features of His life. Otherwise what is the meaning of this - that they are "brought to light by the Gospel"? What is brought to light? Just certain facts? No. Certain values for us, which are to become ours and are to be true of us as of Him, the incorruptible values and features and characteristics of Jesus Christ as the Son of Man. And so we say again that concentration of effectiveness, of values, depended upon these incorruptible elements; and our effectiveness, our value, will correspond to the measure in which there are incorruptible values in our life. Therefore certain things follow.

Incorruption The Standard Measure Of Heaven

Firstly, the standard weights and measures of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of heaven, of eternity, are the one standard of incorruption; that is, everything is weighed and measured, from the Divine standpoint, from Heaven's standpoint, from Eternity's standpoint, according to its incorruptible characteristics. Have you grasped that? It is a tremendous statement, but it is a very true statement. Heaven has no other standard of values, God has no other standard of values, the Holy Spirit has no other standard of values, Eternity has no other standard of values. Everything is weighed and measured by its incorruptibility. Heaven takes this attitude - How much will reappear and abide throughout eternity? How much will come through when all else has gone? What will be found ultimately as glorified? That is heaven's standard; that is the law of the incorruptible.

The Standard Of Incorruption Applied To Our Lives

Therefore, again, we should judge everything of our lives and in our lives by its incorruptible nature and value. You have to sit down with that and think. Everything that makes up my life, everything in my life, brought to the

bar of the incorruptible, i.e. that which can take on glory. How much will stand the test, how much will pass, how much of all that makes up my life will go when time goes, when I leave this world, when all that is here ceases where I am concerned? How much will go on and appear again with eternal glory? It is a very serious challenge; but that is how heaven is viewing things all the time, and that is what heaven is at work upon. All the dealings of the Lord with us are according to that law, that standard - to make very, very little of the corruptible, the passing, the transient, whatever it is, and to make everything of the incorruptible. What will be the proportion of the incorruptible to the corruptible resultant from our time here? I suggest that very few more solemn and serious questions could be asked or faced than that. Oh, how much there is that makes up life, that we are interested in, that we are dealing with, that we are accumulating, how much time, how much expenditure, how much worry, how much there is that is going and will show nothing afterward, will not stand, will not reappear! How much in all this and through all this is incorruptible? How much of it is being turned really to account for the incorruptible, or is just being spent on our corruptible?

I said that our first statement would take on significance when we began to look into this matter. God is primarily concerned with intrinsic value, and that is not with Him a comparative matter - it is an absolute matter. "The fire... shall prove each man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13), the Word says. That is a universal and an imperative dictum. "The fire shall..." - that is imperative - "prove each man's work" - that is universal; and I think, in the light of the New Testament, we would be right in adding 'the fire shall try every man', and not only his work. The fire shall try every man. Fire may mean many things. It may mean the personal fiery trials of which Peter speaks, the fiery trial trying faith, proving the gold. It may be the ordeal of the Church in persecution and suffering - and God knows how much more that may be, in the near future, than it has been in many parts of this world - the fiery ordeal for the Church. But whatever the fire may mean in its manifold application, it is that which puts things into the categories to which they belong. The fire puts the corruptible into the category of the corruptible, and makes it know that it is corruptible, that it belongs there: the fire declares it. The fire, on the other hand, puts the incorruptible into its category, and shows it has no power over that: that belongs to the incorruptible, and the fire has no power over it. It has defined its nature: either that it is of the perishable and the passing, or that it is of the imperishable and the permanent. The fire does that.

And do not let us think merely objectively. Are you in the fire now? Is the fire not at work in your life now - the fiery trial of testing, of adversity? How many words could define the work of the fire in us! Yes, it is a BURNING in our experience. We know already the individual ordeal of fire. What is the fire doing? Why the fire? For one thing only, under the hand and in the intent of God - to put things in their place, to make us think ever more lightly of the corruptible and to lay store by the incorruptible, to make the incorruptible the transcendent in our standard of values. The fire shall try every man and every man's work.

Therefore, again, this law of the incorruptible must be applied to everything. It must be applied firstly to ourselves. When we have lived our lives and have gone hence, what will go on as the substance of the incorruptible resultant from our having been here at all? - a universal question, though a difficult one. What will there be that defeats time, defeats decay, defeats death, defeats the whole realm of corruption, and appears again in glory for ever, as the outcome of our having been on this brief journey on the earth? We have to apply this question of the incorruptible to ourselves.

Applied To Our Knowledge

What about all our Christian knowledge all the teaching we have had, all the truth we possess? We have to apply the question here. How much of that great store of teaching and truth, doctrine and knowledge, is producing the incorruptible in us, is going to appear again in eternity? We must test our conferences by this. We have been, perhaps, to many conferences, we have had a great deal of teaching by one means and another. Well what is the upshot of it all for eternity, when the fire tests our teaching, when the fire tests all our knowledge, perhaps in this life? A great deal of teaching has been given and now the fire is testing the incorruptible value of that teaching. What can survive and triumph over the fire? In all that we know, in our Christian profession, as we bear the name of Christ embodied in the title 'Christian', Christ's one, how much of that very profession is more than a profession? Is it a possession, an intrinsic value, incorruptible reality? All our Christian tradition handed down from our fathers, all that we inherit through the centuries of Christianity: how much of it now is of this particular quality, this essential value, this essence of Christ, and how much is just form, habit, an established and recognised and accepted thing? How much of it in our case is incorruptible? All our emotion, our excitability, our noisiness - is there behind it all that substantial element that will stand up against the fury of Satan, the hatred of hell?

As to ourselves, this matter of the incorruptible is a very pertinent thing, and, if I mistake not, this is going to be the kind of thing that will be pressed home by God to the nth degree at the end-time. If, therefore, we are in the

end-time, and it is not easy to doubt that, such a word is of importance. If we were to turn aside to consider that matter, we should find that never before was there so much in the Scriptures that was never understood, even by its writers, which today is intelligible with a mere modicum of intelligence. The very language of Scripture which could not possibly have been understood at the time when it was written is as patent as anything can be patent today. - But that is an aside. We are unmistakably and undoubtedly at an end-time. Therefore God would gather His people, those who really mean business with Him, and He would begin to say, 'That is good, but there is something very much more than that: this is the thing that matters - the intrinsic value, the essential value'. He would put His finger upon the absolute essentials. How much of the very essence of Christ is wrought into us? That is the point.

Applied To Christian Work

This question of the incorruptible has to be applied, of course, to Christian work and works, and everything must be tested by it. It is all very well - size, appearance, seeming, immediate effects, the trappings and the means - but what about the essential, intrinsic value? God does not judge by the size of a thing as it appears, by the seeming of things, nor by the immediate effects produced by man's means and methods. God is looking through, His eyes are the eyes as of flame, and He looks right in to find the measure of the incorruptible that will not be gone in a week, a month, a year or a few years, but will go right on and appear again. He is looking for that.

There are two kinds of starting-points you know - man's and God's. Man usually starts with big frameworks, with a big plant, machinery, publicity, structures and so on. That is how man usually starts when he is going to do something for God. It is a propensity; it is our way. We may argue that God is worthy of something big. That is man's way. God's way is never like that - it never was. You search in vain to find any instance of God beginning like that. Pentecost came out of very deep and drastic dealings with twelve men. God's starting-point is always the intrinsic. God has always begun with life, with the inherent, with the potential. Man's beginnings usually end in only a small percentage of lasting value. God's beginnings always end in a very great percentage of lasting value. But God's beginnings seem so small, they appear so little. But so does a seed: it is a small thing, a little thing; yet look at the potentialities in one seed, one grain of wheat. It is the intrinsic with God. That is where God begins. That is why anything really of God has a long and hidden history of deep dealings on His part.

God's Secret Work

The thirty years of our Lord's hidden life had a great bearing on the three and a half. The forty years of Moses away back there in the desert, looking after those sheep of his father-in-law, had a great bearing upon the rest of his life. They were not lost, wasted, futile years. And so we could take up one after another - Abraham, David, and others, who had a long, deep, secret hidden history: it was out of that that the effectiveness came. Very often more is done, when God has been at work, in the last few years of a life than in all the years previously. That does not mean that all the previous years have been of no account, having no place. It means that God has been working to get intrinsic values, and now at last these values are coming out. Be careful, young people, that you do not write off older saints as back numbers. You may be violating the very principle of your own life - that of intrinsic value. But God have mercy upon an old man or an old woman who has no intrinsic values. As we get older, we ought to be the substance for the generation to follow. And God help the generation that follows that has not an inheritance of intrinsic value. No, let us be careful how we judge things. It must not be by time, but by the incorruptible.

Let me repeat that God begins with the intrinsic. His greatest things are the coming out of intrinsic values to make themselves known. Therefore He takes a lot of time and a lot of pains in secret history with that one object, and it may be that, though you may be thinking the years are going, and what does it all amount to? - soon life will be past, all over, and you have missed the way, and it has all been a problem, an enigma - it may be that in a few years an infinitude of spiritual value will come out of the time through which you are going, out of this which you think is lost time. Only adjust yourself to this, that God is not careful at all about our standards of values, either in time or in method or in any other way. What God is careful about is to have the inherent, the potential, the essential, the intrinsic. Lay that up in your hearts and cherish it and let it be a real governing factor with you. God works for depths, God works for solidity, God works for intensity: therefore He works through testing, through hiddenness, and with very, very little appeal to our natural pleasure. Incorruption is therefore a very testing thing, and may demand a complete adjustment of our whole mentality.

Having reached this point, we are committed to an enquiry into the nature of the incorruptible. If all the foregoing was true of the Lord Jesus, and if it is true that the Word of God teaches that, Deity and Godhead

The Supreme Importance Of The Incorruptible

apart, what was true of Him in this way is to be reproduced in His own, then we want to know what were the incorruptible things that constituted such a life, and we shall go on to look at these, for it is in this way that we shall have the best explanation of what we have already been considering.