

**Articles and Sermons :: The Sentence of Death****The Sentence of Death - posted by Manfred, on: 2005/4/26 16:12**

The Sentence of Death

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"Yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God, which raiseth the dead.... Always bearing about in the body the deadness of Jesus that the Life also of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal body.", (2 Corinthians 1:9, 4:10).

"The sentence of death in ourselves" - That is the very basis of everything in real spiritual fruitfulness and effectiveness. Of course, here Paul is undoubtedly speaking in the first place about something very serious which had overtaken him... something which had come in the way of a terrible affliction, and he said he despaired of life and had the very sentence of death in himself so that there was no hope whatever for him from any human standpoint - there was no hope according to all human judgments and verdicts. He ought to have died - the very sentence of death was in him - and I do like the way he puts it, it is so richly significant: he uses just the little word THAT, which gives an entirely different complexion to the whole situation. He might have put it: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves and we cannot trust in ourselves"; but he did not put it like that. Of course, that would be quite logical to say, "We had the sentence of death - it was there; and that being the case, we were no good for anything at all, and there was no hope whatever, and therefore we cannot trust ourselves."

But he did not put it that way. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves THAT...." There is purpose in it - there is an object in it - there is something in it as a basic and fundamental principle. He realized that it was not the end but the beginning, with a design that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raiseth the dead... so that the sentence of death was not the end but the beginning of everything. There was a real purpose in this thing.

If you take up the Holy Spirit's teaching in the New Testament, you will find that this has become the foundational principle of all Divine activities and operations: the sentence of death passed upon us and registered in us and working out in us, and all the time another thing doing the work of God, triumphing over this sentence of death in us - this other thing which is in us, working through us, giving us ascendancy over death in Christ, so that the wonderful things of God are manifest by us when there is no accountableness for them in us. The Lord has swept away with one stroke the whole basis of our trust in ourselves - has wiped out forever any hope in ourselves - not to destroy us, not to make everything impossible - but THAT He who raiseth the dead might show the mighty works by this Resurrection Life which is fruitful in us.

Have you noticed... that even Herod, "that old fox" when it was reported to him that the Lord Jesus was doing His many mighty works, said, "This is John the Baptist, risen from the dead; therefore these mighty works are shown"? Risen from the dead - mighty works! How he got that inkling I don't know, but there is this principle in it, that resurrection from the dead implies mighty works - works mightier than those before death.

This is the principle all the way through the Word, that on the ground of a Life wrought in us through the cross by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is able to achieve and accomplish His supreme purpose. But in order to do it, the sentence of death must be planted right at the center of our old life to rule it out, so that where we despair of life in ourselves and have no trust in ourselves, we know we cannot of ourselves accomplish anything, there is the mighty Life of God for everything - this that is "Christ in you" the Life of God, the hope of glory.

Now this is only the beginning of things, the basis: if you are going to be effective in the realm where the prince, the Lord of Death holds sway, you cannot be effective by the means and resources in which he has got a stronghold; and he has that in all the resources of our natural life, however fine and splendid they may be from the natural standpoint. The only thing that can be effective in that realm is the Life whereby Jesus conquered death. In order that that Life might have full sway and free course, and the utmost and fullest fruitfulness of that Life as triumphant over death might abound, all that in which the enemy has any hold whatsoever - our natural life - has got to be put out. We must have no trust in ourselves for this work.

Now that immediately defines and delimits the measure of spiritual effectiveness. It is the measure of His Life coming thr

ough by the sentence of death being in ourselves... In all oppositions, adversity, trial, affliction, Paul sees a great advantage for the Life of God - that this "death" is complementary really to the purpose of God - that it is aiding the purpose of God. Paul always looked upon things in that way. He saw that those things which might be reckoned impossible of fruitfulness to God were essential to make that fruitfulness possible. Death itself is not the end of all things, but is the beginning of things where God is concerned.

Now, beloved, we are right up against this whole situation... of dealing with the system of spiritual evil and spiritual death. We have often said of late that we have passed, and are passing more completely, out of the era and time of certain orders of Christian work. I think it is recognized by most spiritually-minded people that the old forms of Christian enterprise - organized religious activity - are breaking down, are failing everywhere. It seems that the thing has been rejected and cannot meet the need.

We have passed into a new time, a new phase which we believe to be that culminating phase in the age when we shall come more directly into conflict with the forces of darkness - with the power of Satan. The Church has been meeting him for a long time through things, and now it is going to meet him face to face; and that is the time and condition into which we are moving now. We are finding that means and old forms and institutions and organizations cannot meet the more direct encounter with the enemy. We are being forced to recognize the need of something more, and that something more is simply the naked Life of God as manifested in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ coming into tremendous contact with the whole system of death and of darkness. That is our position.

Now the movement is to be along this line where the Life of God, unmixed with the resources of men - with human machinery and human drive and human enterprise - the very Life of God has got to be directly, immediately, nakedly manifest in the Church for the last phase of the battle unto the ultimate triumph.

In order that this might be so, there must be this tremendous emphasis of God upon the need for the wiping out of all that which stands in the way of a pure and clear manifestation of His Life, and of the intermingling of those things in which there is death (that is, the natural life of man). All that intermingling has got to be removed, and God is coming to the time - has come to the time - when He is going to have very close accounts with His people, so that you cannot touch the earth, you cannot touch the flesh, you cannot touch the world, you cannot touch anything in which death is, without at once having a check and an arrest put upon your spiritual effectiveness; you have to stand absolutely clear.

Beloved, the principle of Life in your spirit is to be the guiding principle of all your service in the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not mean Life in your surroundings. The Lord may take you to a place where death reigns, but if death reigns in you, you may as well give up the whole thing at once. You may be there, and the Life of God may be in you to meet that situation - to triumph over it; but mark you, if you begin to touch what you call pieces of work for God and there is no Life in your spirit - the thing is dead in your spirit - you have no right there until you get in your spirit the Life of God relative to that thing. Don't touch it, or you will be found in dead works, trying to do something where there is no vital principle at all.

Now note: it is all very well to have a broad view and say, Yes, but the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Life, has come into the world - where death is - in order to save the world; and that Life can be taken as the broad basis upon which we should enter upon any work for the Lord that seems to offer itself or is presented to us.

But that is no criterion. There was a time when the Lord Jesus recognized in His spirit that the living purpose of God was arrested with regard to certain situations, and He had no Life witness there... and He came out.

We believe that that was so in the case of Israel as a nation. He gathered the whole situation up in the incident of the fig tree. Israel was ministered to - witnessed to - for a long time, but the moment came when the curse of God had to fall upon it (what is the curse of God? It is death). From that moment He was cut off from Israel; He had no ministry to Israel as such. He recognized in His spirit that there was death there, and it was no use being sentimental about poor Israel - no use trying to act upon a basis of human sympathy and compassion and having imaginations and mental pictures of what could be done and what might be done; that was an end.

I am only using this by way of illustration, for spiritual effectiveness demands that we should have the witness of LIFE in our spirit. A lot of people hold on and continue in certain realms, certain spheres, certain companies, certain connections; and they are there merely from the standpoint of natural reasoning and argument, sentimentally, traditionally, or somehow thinking that, by staying in, something is going to be done; while in their spirit they know the thing is dead, and they have no Life there.

May that not be the Lord's witness to them that they should serve Him where they have Life - where the witness of Life is in them, and a spirit of promise? If all around is dead but they have Life in themselves, it is all right; but if all around is dead and they have no Life in their ministry, surely something is wrong - the door is closed. It is important that for spiritual effectiveness up to the hilt, the witness of Life in us should be borne.

Of course, we have swept aside in ourselves that which might bring the death - we have stood by the cross and seen that the sentence of death must be in ourselves as such in order to make the Life possible; but if that has been dealt with and we have the sentence of death - we no longer trust in ourselves but put our faith in Him who raiseth the dead, then we have the right to claim and receive the witness of Resurrection Life in ourselves for ministry as the Lord appoints. And the day in which the Lord brings death upon one's spirit in any sphere or kind of ministry, that is the day when one will begin to look to see where the Lord is going to bear the witness of Life for ministry. Now that is important.

I do not know why the Lord should give one such emphasis upon this, but it is no use your going on to do God's work when you have death in your spirit. Nothing will come of it; drop it; and ask the Lord to bring you into a place where you can in your spirit bear witness by Life - the Life whereby Jesus conquered death - to meet the situation as it is around you.

Oh, that God's people had discernment, spiritual discernment! The one cry in our spirit is that His people might be more discerning - be able to discern in their spirit where Life is and where death is. You know how frequently we have tried to do a thing for the Lord - to do a thing with the best motive for the Lord - and inside there has been death. Dead! And yet we have tried to do it - to force it - and there is nothing but waste of energy and waste of time. We have got to get on to the thing that God is doing, for only in this can we have the witness of Life that it is the thing of God and that we shall get through. In order that He might be able to consummate His purpose - gather up His plan and bring it to a mighty, victorious issue in the coming of the Lord, our need is to have Life more abundant... and the spiritual discernment by Life to know where Life is and where death is. You may be doing what you call the work of God and have death in your Spirit; and that very doing of what you call the work of God - because there is death in your spirit - is antagonistic to the purpose of God. You may have Life in your Spirit and death all around, but the fact that you have the witness of Life is both the key and the assurance that something is to be accomplished.

I believe, beloved, that we dare not do a thing unless we have definite witness in our spirit that it is the thing of God to be done through us.... Is God in this; is God in that; has God undertaken it? The answer to that question in your spirit will not be an audible voice; it must ever be the liberty and the freedom and the uprising of His Life in you that gives you a clear way through in your spirit.

The Lord teach us how to be led thus in our spirit by the Holy Spirit that He may bring us to the place where the maximum of spiritual effectiveness is attained. In order that it may be so, we must have "the sentence of death in our selves (our flesh), that we should not trust in ourselves" always bearing "the deadness of the Lord Jesus, that His Life might be manifested."

God only works now on resurrection ground - by Resurrection Life - and this life in us is the basis of the Holy Spirit's operation in revelation and service.

The law of the Spirit is Life (Romans 8:2).