

The Resurrection and the Life.

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Text: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11: 25.

About two months before the war broke out I was at Grindelwald, a little hamlet four thousand feet up amongst the Alps in Switzerland. I lifted my eyes from the paper on which I had written these words, and I gazed upon the Elger, with its mantle of freshly fallen snow glistening brilliantly in the morning light. I heard the roar of falling waters, much louder after yesterday's rain. The birds were singing blithely. The scents were rising from the meadows like incense from some great altar. Then I turned my eyes away from the mountain and looked at a house a little way up the road, and I saw that all the blinds were drawn; death had paid a visit in the night. Up against the house was a field of newly cut grass, with all its bonny wild flowers withering away. And I recalled the word of the Psalmist: "As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth; for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." Then I looked at my notebook, and there the words were written: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Death among the Alps seemed cruel irony. It was the entry of a presence that was appallingly intrusive. Everything in my surroundings was so virginally pure, so lovely, so fragrant, that death appeared utterly out of place, a horrible discord in the gracious harmony. Death and sorrow in those fair, upland scenes of sheltered seclusion and simplicity. And death and sorrow in Bethany, too, among that little handful of quiet houses just over the brow of Olivet and in the home where Mary and Martha dwelt: "Now Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus," yet the great commonplace of death lifted the latch of their home and walked in and exercised his dark dominion. We cannot get away from the fact of death.

1. If Jesus had become reincarnated in Grindelwald on that sunny morning in June, what would he have said in that darkened home where the wild flowers were withering about the door? What did he say to his friends in Bethany? Perhaps it might be well, before we ask what he said, to inquire how he looked and what he did. "When Jesus, therefore, saw her weeping, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled and said: 'Where have ye laid him?' They say unto him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept." Why did Jesus weep? Why was he troubled? He was troubled because he is love, and love is the most sensitive thing in the world, and love always grieves when it comes in contact with grief.

2. But this statement does not account for all Jesus' sorrow. His love touched the grief of others, his holiness touched their sin. As the degree of our love determines the fineness of our communion with other people's sorrows, so the degree of our holiness will determine the degree in which we are sensitive to human sin.

If our holiness is only an elementary grade, we shall have only an elementary perception of sin, and with only an elementary grief we dimly discern its presence. As our holiness becomes rarer and more pure, our sense of sin grows more acute, and we are grievously hurt by the scenes of its ravage and desolation. A man's holiness is just his sense and love of the divine order. And his love and sense of the divine order will determine his perception of the moral disorder which prevails in the world. When superlative holiness—holiness far more pure than snow that has never caught a grain of vagrant dust—when superlative, sinless holiness stands in a graveyard, with death itself as the supreme token of the disorder and the ruin effected by sin, is it any wonder that its spiritual sensitiveness trembles in trouble and grief? "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned." When Jesus stood in the graveyard he saw the presence of death, and he saw the sin through which death had come among the children of men, and standing there in the moral disorder he wept. Now we are face to face with our problems. In that graveyard we meet the dread trinity of sin, sorrow and death. That little plot in Bethany typifies the clamant needs of the world. What will you do with sin, sorrow and death? I, for one, will always test anti-Christ, and all advertised ministers of anti-Christ, by the world's sternest realities. I will challenge them to produce their remedies and their healing specifics in the presence of sin, sorrow and death. They must not treat life as merely a jolly parade ground, with no powder about and no deadly missiles hurling through the air. I will have no conference with any philosopher who brushes the Christ to one side, then offering us his frivolous wares, as though life were only a sweet lyric, a lively idyll a sunny summer morning when the birds are always singing and the shepherd's pipe is echoing among the quiet hills. No, that is neither your life nor mine. Come away to the plot at Bethany or to the realities of any lot where we find the aggressive presence of sin, sorrow and death. If human life were one long May day, a May-day religion would suffice, and Jesus Christ need never have come, nor need never have died. Let us face the realities; let us demand that any presuming philosopher who brings to us a new gospel, face the realities of life and deal with the tremendous and dominating presence of sin, sorrow and death.

3. "Jesus wept." Now, what did he say? "I am the Resurrection and the Life." His word is startling. There is about it a suggestion of adequacy and of all-sufficient resource. At any rate, the Lord Jesus Christ is not toying lightly with our needs. He stands in the presence of death, and he proclaims the great awakening word: "I am the resurrection." He stands in the presence of sin and sorrow, which make the heart faint and fail, and he proclaims the vitalizing word: "I am the life." But what does Jesus mean by the great words: "I am the resurrection and the life?" Let us

turn to other things he said at this time, and let us lay hold of a word spoken a moment later by the Lord, for it may help to set our minds upon the road of true interpretation. Here then is the later word: "Whosoever believeth in me shall never die!" But surely, believers do die. I cast my eyes around my church, and in every part of it I can see gaps made by the passing of our fellow-members who certainly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can recall one who had ecstatic faith in the Lord. Her faith was almost sight, and it kept her spirit in a sort of perpetual spring-time, and rarely could you meet her without hearing the songs of birds. But she passed away. Yet Jesus said: "Whosoever believeth in me shall never die." After all, then, did our believing friend die?

4. What does Jesus mean by death? To him the real death is spiritual death, and spiritual death is the alienation of the soul from the life and blessedness of God. Jesus places little or no emphasis upon physical death, and he said very little about it because where there is no spiritual death physical death is only an incident. It is just a brief transition. Our Lord spoke of such physical death as only a sleep, a closing of the eyes on one scene and an opening of them upon another scene of indescribable brightness and glory. So that when Jesus speaks of death and dying he is speaking of something far more terrible, something of which physical death is only a very dim and imperfect symbol.

To the holy eyes of the Lord even some of us even now are dead. "Thou hast a name to live," he very solemnly says, "and thou art dead." There are people who are only existing, they are out of correspondence with eternal life, and they have no more to do with God than the dead wood which forms the pulpit in which I speak has to do with the quickening energies of the spring. They are living in alienation from God, in absolute indifference to God, in flagrant hostility to the declared will and purpose of God; and it would be true that nothing in their life would be vitally changed if it could now be authoritatively proclaimed that God is dead. That is the real death, the only thing worth while calling death. It is relation to that death and to that death first of all that Christ is the resurrection and the life. He is the marvelous minister of a present resurrection, for he can raise dead souls to life again. Let us pause upon the tremendous words, let us ponder them, let us give them all the weight of their startling significance. A man may have been spiritually dead for years, he may have been as dead to the reality of God as an iron pillar which is supporting a gallery is dead to the call of the spring, the song of the birds and the fragrance of flowers. But now hear the gospel: Through Jesus Christ he can have life and spiritual sensitiveness and lofty consciousness, and far-reaching heavenly correspondence, because his soul can rejoice in the communion of the Holy Ghost. That is the primary resurrection which is to be found in Christ Jesus. The soul has emerged from the foulest of all tombs and is now living in the light of eternal hope. The soul has