

THE SOUL'S AWAKENING

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.”

John 5:25

I suppose that when a pearl-fisher is at the bottom of the sea and has gathered his bag full of oysters, he will sometimes see other oysters lying about which he would be very very glad to take up if he could. And I can imagine that when he has been safely taken into his boat and has put away what he gathered the first time, he will be rather anxious to descend again somewhere near that same spot to bring up those which he left behind. This, at least, is much like my own case. While reading the Chapter and preparing the sermon for this morning, I thought there were so many pearls in the text I could not say much about this particular verse so I felt inclined to return to the same spot at once to see if we might not fetch up some fresh gems!

Those of you who were present this morning will remember that we saw in the Chapter a three-fold gradation of lifegiving in the Person of Christ. As here and there in the Old Testament dispensation, God had raised up some persons from the dead, so Christ, also, in the days of His flesh, had quickened whom He would—persons naturally dead He had restored to natural life. This is the first and, indeed, a very wonderful prerogative of live-giving for Christ to exercise to be able to raise Lazarus from the grave or to raise the young daughter of the ruler or to restore to the widow her departed son. The second form of life-giving is that described in the verse before us. He was constantly giving through His voice spiritual life to those who were spiritually dead. The third kind of life-giving we spoke of is that of the universal resurrection when all that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall rise to judgment. It is to the second that we propose to direct our attention this evening—a form of life-giving which is going on now—not a matter of the past as was the raising of a few in Christ’s day. Not a matter of the future as the coming resurrection is, but a matter of the present—not so apparent to the eye and to the ear as either of those mysteries, in so much that it is to a great extent invisible except to the man who is a participator in it, but just as real, just as miraculous and, in many senses, even more marvelous and Divine! Christ is constantly raising the spiritually dead and giving them life. Oh that we may be enabled by God’s Spirit to open up this Truth of God to your understanding and may it be applied to your hearts! Our first endeavor shall be to describe—

1. WHAT IT IS TO BE SPIRITUALLY DEAD.

“The hour is coming,” says the Savior, “and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live.” What is it to be spiritually dead? You all know what it is for the body to be physically dead. The soul has departed and has left the body incapable, insensible, unable to preserve itself. The soul was like salt to it—that being gone, it soon becomes putrid and obnoxious. Poor dead body! A most terrible and humiliating spectacle to see—especially to look upon it after it has been lying for a while in the grave. We have, most of us, heard what it is to be morally dead. It does not happen, I hope, to very many, but there are some who seem to be dead to all moral feeling of right and wrong between their fellow men—that is what I mean just now by morality. They have been so inured to theft, uncleanness, drunkenness and, some few even to murder, that when they have been arrested, convicted, imprisoned—nothing seemed to move them to repentance! Even the dread of the last terrible penalty of the law has not sufficed to bring from some of them any kind of emotion. Those who have been most earnest to arouse their conscience have felt the most painful conviction that their moral faculties were totally defunct. They have become callous, seared as with a hot iron. It is an awful spectacle to see a man morally dead—blind to reason, deaf to warning, numb to shame—thus morally dead. His passions raging without control, he becomes like some wild wolf of whom all the district is afraid! Like a raging lion going about in quest of prey whom every man dreads to encounter and whom some think it only right to slay. May none of us ever fall into such infamy! Alas, it might be! Step by step, little

by little, men have become outcasts from society and found their lodging in the very lairs of corruption though they were born in better circumstances and trained with brighter prospects! May God grant we may never come to it ourselves!

But to be spiritually dead—what is that? It is something like these two, but I think it is somewhat different. I must describe spiritual death not in its essence, for that I cannot do, but in its outward signs. Now observe a spiritually deadman. He is not dead in any other respect. He walks abroad and sees the fields full of abundant harvests. At night-fall he looks up to the skies and marks the glorious scenery of night. By day he climbs the mountains, beholds the valleys beneath in all their smiling beauty and gazes upward at the golden sun above. God is to be seen in all these—God manifestly the Creator, Preserver and Benefactor of mankind—but this man does not perceive Him. He sees no God. Perhaps he can stand like Byron under the shadow of Mont Blanc and write himself, “Atheos,” without God where God is everywhere! Where God is in every breath of air, where God is in every flower beneath his feet, he sees not the footprints of the Almighty! He believes not in His secret Presence. Is the Great Eternal First Cause defunct, then, or is there no God? No, Sirs, the man’s perception of God is all gone and that is all that is gone! His power to realize spiritual things has failed or else his ears would hear the voice of God in the sounding tops of the pines! His eyes would see the name of God written in golden letters in the midnight sky! His every sense would perceive God and his inmost soul drink deep of God—but he is dead and, therefore, he cannot! Watch that man in the common events of Providence. Many mercies have come to his store—there are happy children climbing his knee, his wife is in strong health and full of happiness—they have no need to look from where the next meal shall come. The stream of mercy flows hard by their door and this has been continued many years! They have long enjoyed uninterrupted prosperity! Now, all this comes from God, and health and strength are peculiarly His gifts. The power to get and the power to enjoy our earthly goods must both proceed from Him. But this man never sees God in it at all! He sometimes talks of luck and thinks himself a fortunate fellow. Luck, chance and fortune—these seem to be his deity! Though the hand of God, wide open and full of bounty, is so spread out that one might think a bat or an owl might see it, yet this man perceives it not! The man is dead to the perception of spiritual things that the great Master-Spirit, Himself, is not perceived when He comes near loaded with favors!

As it is in Nature and as it is with the gifts of Providence, so especially it is in anything like outward religion. The man attends a place of worship—it may be he repeats his creed, joins in a form of prayer, or possibly he drops in where simpler worship is adopted and what does he do? He sings as others sing! He bows his head as others do in prayer. He listens as others do to the preaching of the Word, but it is a heavy dull monotonous service to him! He wishes it were over. He sees nothing in it. If he had his way and custom did not bind him at all, he would never he found wasting his time in such unprofitable proceedings as he thinks them to be! He is like the mouse in Church that thinks the Bibles and Prayer Books dry nibbling! He would rather be in the common ale-house, or at home reading novels, or walking out in the fields, or anywhere than in the place of worship! Yet others sitting by his side have found the most profound pleasure in those sacred engagements which have only brought weariness to him! Unlike him, they have been carried as on eagles’ wings up to Heaven! Their souls have been filled with joy and peace and they have said as they have retired, “Surely God was in this place and it was good to be here.” Why is this? The things ministered and the man who ministered them were the same. Ah, the one was dead while the others lived! How shall the dead derive comfort? How shall the dead be charmed? How shall the dead be fed and instructed? God was in the sermon but the carnally-minded man, being dead, perceived Him not!

Nor, my dear Friends, is this spiritual death merely a failure to recognize the Being of God—it is equally seen in reference to the moral obligations it involves. Man, by nature, is dead to the right and to the true, to the commandments of the Lord which enlighten the eyes and to the testimony of the Lord which makes wise the simple. He is probably alive to his obligations to his fellow men because he has a clear understanding of their obligations to him. He generally keeps himself within the bounds of law and decency, but his greater obligations to his Creator—these cross not his mind—yet it is the very essence of rectitude and truth that He who made all things should be served by those He made and that He who sustains life in all His creatures should have honor from those creatures who owe their continued existence to Him! Why does the ungodly man not think of this? How is it he can live for 30 or 40 years sustained by God and yet never give to God

the service of his heart—scarcely thinking about his God at all? How is it? Why, because the man is dead to spiritual obligations! It must be so or else he would lament that he had not met those obligations and begin to repent that he had transgressed the bounds that his Maker set. The man is dead, Sirs—dead!

Further the natural man is dead to eternal things. How quick-eared he is to the things of time—how swift to perceive their value and in what haste to grasp them if he can! But ah, the eternal realities which God has revealed in Scripture the man neither cares to hear about them nor, hearing them, do they excite any desires within his spirit! Alas, my Hearers, we have sometimes had to warn you of the judgment to come. We have had to take down the shrill-sounding trumpet and blow an alarm! We have had to tell you that there is a dreadful Hell into which the wicked, dying impenitent, must be cast! How is it that men are not stirred by a theme so truthful and so dreadful? Because they are dead! They would be awake enough if they were afraid that their house should be on fire and that they, themselves, might be burned with the natural element! Yet the spiritual danger far more to be apprehended arouses them not—because they are dead to it. At other times it has been our delight to speak of Heaven, to picture the pearly-gated city with all its azure brightness, with its bejeweled foundations and to talk of its inhabitants, all blessed forever, who walk in the light of their glorious King! And surely it were enough to make the cold marble heart glow with warmth! But no, the thing moved not men. Some little joy of earth would whet their appetite far more quickly! It is because to the spiritual Heaven revealed in Scripture men are altogether dead and care not for it! Oh Sirs, 'tis sad, 'tis sad, 'tis very sad that to the fleeting shadows we should be wide awake but to that substantial Truth of God we should be sound asleep—that after the poor gewgaws and child's bubbles of this mortal state, we should be all agog—but as to the solid joys and lasting pleasures of an eternal world, we show no desire! This again is a mark of spiritual death!

I must hurry on to mark a few more indications of this spiritual death. Prayer is one of the most blessed engagements and occupations of men while they are out of Heaven—to ask of the All-Bountiful One the mercies which they need. But there are some here tonight who never pray—who never really ask of God what they require. They take the attitude of supplicants, perhaps as a matter of habit, but there they are like kneeling corpses! They do not pray—they are dead to prayer. Open this Book, this holy Bible, before them. There was never such another—no angel ever gazed upon a page more rich with glory than this! This Book it is that opens to us immortality and gives us the news of eternal love! Set the natural man down before it. It is to him a mere history or a dry book of dogmatic matters! He sees nothing in it that can charm him, nothing that can interest his spirit. The man is dead, Sir! To the sightless eyeballs, the brightest jewels flash back no radiance. He is dead! Yes, to Christ, Himself, the man is dead for when He is preached—Christ, the Father's Son, the virgin's Child, the condescending Savior, the ascending Conqueror, the exalted King crowned with Glory—why the people of God delight to hear of Him! To them the savor of Jesus' name is like ointment poured forth! But exhibit this Savior to the natural man and he perceives nothing! How could he? He is dead—dead in trespasses and sins! All the outward phenomena that you will discern in the best natural man indicate that whatever kind of light there may be in him, the Light of God that deals with God, with the spirit-world, the world to come, is not there! He is unconscious of these! He has no fellowship with them. He is dead and a prey to corruption! When we have paused a minute we shall endeavor to describe—

II. THE WORD WHICH JESUS BRINGS TO THE DEAD.

“The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is, in Scripture, especially in the Gospel of John, called, “the Word.” Here His voice is spoken of but what is a voice apart from the person that utters it? What is the Word which Jesus speaks by which dead men are quickened? Is not Jesus Christ, Himself, the Word of God to man? The distinct articulate manifestation of Deity is Jesus Christ! Now, let me show you this. Jesus Christ came, once upon a time, from Heaven. He condescended to become a Baby, to be nursed in a manger, to hang on a woman's breast. He was God! What did that say—that Child, that Baby—Human, yet Divine? Why, it said this, “God has pity upon man and has not left him. He is about to establish an intimate relationship between Himself, the great and the glorious, and man, the weak and the pitiable—a union not at first between God and fully developed man, but between God and

the Baby, as if it should be said the weakest and feeblest of all that bear the name of manhood may take comfort, for God has come down and taken a Baby's form into union with Himself!" That meant pity! It meant mercy! It meant fellowship and it meant hope to the race of man! To this end Jesus passed a life in the midst of all our sorrows, infirmities and took upon Himself our sickness!

And what did that mean? Why it meant compassion. A beautiful word, that—compassion—a united passion, a fellow-feeling, a kindred suffering! It seemed to say, "God is not indifferent to your woes. Oh, sons of men! You have fallen through your sins, but God pities you! God feels for you! He is no flinty-hearted Jupiter who sits serenely on his throne amidst the pains and agonies and eternal death of his creatures! No, but He has come down to you! He has taken upon Himself, Manhood, that He may suffer with man and let man see that He has not left him, but that He feels for him! And after He had lived a life of holiness which was, indeed, comparatively but a small part of His work, our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself up to die! Into the Garden He went and there the wrath of God was laid upon Him till that precious cluster was so crushed in the awful press of the Divine Wrath that great red drops of bloody sweat were distilled from every pore like the red juice from the cluster! He went to Pilate's Hall, to Herod's tribunal, to be mocked and scourged and spat upon and, at last, in extreme agony He offered up His life on the accursed tree! What did He say to us then? He said this—"God is just. I come down to you poor mortal men and, taking upon Myself your nature and taking also your sins as your Substitute, I have to suffer." Christ Jesus' suffering is a loud word from God to this effect, "I pity you men, but your sins I must punish. I cannot pass them by. If they are laid upon My Son, I must prostrate My Son beneath their load. I cannot wink at sin though it is laid upon the perfect Substitute, for even there I must hunt it to the death! It is an accursed thing and must not be tolerated. I must stamp it out of My universe."

This is God's Word. He says, "Justice as well as compassion. Pity but pity consistent with severity." Moreover Jesus rose again from the dead and now He ever lives at the right hand of God and His Holy Spirit has come and animates, at this time, the preaching of the Word with Divine energy! Christ now declares to us God's Word after this fashion, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. Whoever will trust in the Incarnate Son of God and fully rely upon the merits of His wondrous suffering shall be saved. God wills not the death of the sinner, but had rather that he should turn unto Him and live! And everyone that will turn unto the living God and trust His Son to make propitiation, shall be saved from the damning power of sin and have everlasting life." Christ, the Living One, is God's Word to us that we shall be delivered from the wrath to come if we trust in Him, even as He, Himself, was delivered when He rose again from the dead and ascended into Glory!

My dear Friends, the Gospel which I preach again, tonight, is that which I have always preached and always will preach until I have a fear lest I should preach till you are almost nauseated with the repetition! Yet if it were so, I could not help it, for no other name do I dare to preach, nor is there any other foundation that I dare to lay and bid you build on it but this! Jesus Christ, the Son of God has come! Here on earth He lived and died and suffered for the sake of mankind. God is a God of Love, but He is also a God of Justice. There is a way in which He can be just and yet tender to you. If you trust His dear Son, your sins shall not destroy you! Christ's sufferings shall stand instead of yours and you shall live! If you will now accept Christ. If you now will lean fully on Jesus. If you now will fling away both your love of sin and your love of your own righteousness and come and rest where God would have you rest, God shall be reconciled to you and you shall be His child and you shall live forever and ever! I must now close with third point—

III. THE MODE BY WHICH THIS WORD IS APPLIED.

"The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear." I have told you what they will hear. They will hear the Word of God! But who will speak it? Who is it that alone can speak it to purpose? Why—"When the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, they that hear shall live." Whenever any dead soul lives, it is through the Word, but it is not through the voice of the preacher. That is but an instrument and nothing more! The real voice that makes dead souls live is the voice of Christ Jesus! What, is it so? Does He actually speak to every soul that is saved? He

does! I do not mean in fancy as though you heard voices in the air, but I mean that this Word which I have just now preached to you must come home to your heart and your conscience and be applied by the Holy Spirit so that you prove its power and feel its energy. Through the Holy Spirit, it is that the voice of Christ is heard in the soul! But while I speak to you thus, some will say, "What, then, can we do with sinners as we have not the voice that can raise them?" Why you can pluck your Master by the skirt and say to Him, "Good Lord, speak the Word! Speak the Word!" When I come into this pulpit, the prayer that rises to my heart always—I hope I can always say without guile—is this, "Lord be here to speak, Yourself, through me." I am persuaded that though I preach to dead sinners ten thousand years, never will one be saved by my voice. Why, then, do I preach to sinners knowing them to be dead? Because I am simply the instrument of Christ and He speaks through His voice with His own Spirit, which is as His voice, and the dead do hear and they are made to live—not without the instrumentality, not through the instrumentality, alone, but by the voice of Jesus Christ! I ask you, then, dear Brothers and Sisters who are alive to God, to pray that Jesus would speak while the preacher speaks. Be lifting up your hearts and silently crying—

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Oh, let the dead now hear Your voice!

*Bid, Lord Your banished ones rejoice!
Their beauty this their glorious dress
Jesus the Lord our righteousness!"*

What encouragement there is in this for you, my Brothers and Sisters! However feeble you may be in yourselves, yet if it is the voice of Christ you have to rely upon, what power there is in that! You may go to your class and say, "I cannot teach these troublesome boys and these inattentive girls! How can I hope to see them saved?" Ah but your Master can speak through you and He can do what you cannot! Though it is true that old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon, he is not too strong for the mighty Savior whose voice does not merely speak to the living, but to the dead—and all who hear that voice shall live! Bend your ear, then, and bow down your heart! Attend to the voice of Christ seeing that thereby, alone, the dormant faculties can be quickened and a lively interest excited!

Yet while Christ speaks to the dead, power is communicated to them that they may have it and use it, call it their own and exercise it. "You must not imagine that man is passive in the matter. What does it say, "Draw us," and we will be drawn? No, but, "Draw us and we will run after You." There comes an activity. I have heard some speak of faith and repentance as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Most truly so they are, but why speak of these gifts as though the sinner had nothing to do to repent and to believe? Always remember that it is you who must repent and believe. The Holy Spirit will not repent for you! What would He repent about? He never did wrong. And the Holy Spirit will not believe for you. What would He believe for? He is God, Himself! The fact is that the Apostle has expressed it exactly when he says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure." Christ gives the voice but the man hears. There is something done—there is a something to be received. It is no great act to hear a sound when it is made. It is no great act to receive mercy when it is presented. Yet the hearing is a miracle, for the dead hear! And the receiving by faith is a miracle, for none do this but those to whom it is given—yet it is done by man. Faith and repentance are gifts of God—the voice that saves is the voice of Christ but the point of personal salvation is reached when the man actively hears and receives the Truth of God!

I pray you, then, my dear Hearers, if you would be saved, be diligent in hearing the Gospel! I would urge you to frequent those places of worship most where there is most of Christ preached. Do not seek after eloquence, oratory, gaudy periods or grotesque observations that might amuse you. You have something else to do on the Lord's Day besides being amused and having your ears tickled! There is a soul in you that will either be saved or lost—and this day is given you peculiarly that you may listen to the Gospel which saves you! Hunt out the Gospel in your locality! Follow it

wherever you may hear it preached. I entreat you to hear it, but do not think that the mere hearing it with your outward ears will be enough! Alas, such a hearing may involve responsibility and bring you no blessing. I pray you ask the Lord as you go up to the House of Prayer to open your inward ears to quicken you from your spiritual death and give you to derive profit. I do believe, my dear Friends, that few will miss a blessing who hear a Gospel minister anxiously desiring to get a blessing. In these waters, men shall catch what they fish for! And if you seek earnestly after God's blessing, you shall find it! Thirst for it! Pant for it! Long for it! You already have the beginning of it, for to desire Grace is an evidence that you have Grace in a measure! And to earnestly seek Christ is already to have something from Christ—a foretaste of the feast they enjoy who find Him!

Ah, my dear Friends, we keep on preaching and you keep on coming and going, Sunday after Sunday, but how is it with you? Are you saved or not? A man opens a shop for the sale of medicines and I will suppose them to have great medicinal virtue. There is a plague in the district and he asks himself, "Are these drugs, after all, what they profess to be?" If men keep on dying, he will, as an honest man, begin to get anxious and to enquire. And if he meets with persons who are talking of other things, he will say, "Nonsense! Put them aside a bit. I want to ask you about something of more importance. Are these drugs of mine true shots with which to do battle with the plague? Are these the weapons with which to chase away this horrible disease and avert the threat? Is the plague increasing in your street or is it dying out?" Oh I want to push these questions home to you tonight! I know I preach the Word of Christ. I am sure I have told you the Gospel of His salvation. The voice of Christ I cannot imitate nor would I if I could. 'Tis His to use His own voice. His tongue and His tongue, only, is like a two-edged sword which can cut and cure, kill and heal at the same time! How is it with you? Are you saved? Are you awakened? Are you seeking? Are you finding? Or are you, after all, just hearing and hearing and hearing again and again to no purpose? Ah, I would to God that I were not the preacher to such as you and that you were not my hearers, for I cannot bear that I should be adding to your condemnation! That I should be hardening you—for so it must be—hardening your hearts with the very Truth of God that ought to soften them! I pray the Master bring you into a different state and give you to lay hold on these things, for if they are not true, it is time I had done preaching them! But if they are true, it is time you had received them! If they are not true, it is time that these services were given over, for they are awful farces! But if this Book is true and Christ's Gospel is true, it is time that you did not make farces of them but that you turned unto God with full purpose of heart!

The Lord save you for Jesus' sake. Amen.