

The Gospel of Life

by Ed Marks

The Gospel of John is the Gospel of life. John reveals what life is and how life is the way to fulfill God's purpose, which is God's building. We have to understand the meaning of the words *life* and *building* in regard to the Gospel of John. Simply put, life is God in Christ as the living content, and building is the corporate expression of the Triune God. God's building is the church as the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem (Matt. 16:18; Rev. 21:2). God's intention is to dispense Himself in Christ as the life-giving Spirit into our being with all of His unsearchable riches so that we can become the fullness of God for His glory, His expression, in the church (Eph. 1:22-23; 3:8-11, 16-21).

In the Greek language there are three words for life. *Bios* refers to the physical life; the word *biology* is derived from this word. *Psuche* refers to the psychological life, the life of the soul, the leading part of which is the mind; the word *psychology* is derived from this word. *Zoe* refers to the divine life, the uncreated life, which is God Himself. We can take academic courses in biology and psychology to study both the physical life and the psychological life. But in order to study *zoe*, we have to study the Gospel of John and be under the illuminating instruction of the Holy Spirit. This kind of study involves prayer so that our minds may be enlightened with the light of life (8:12) to see God's heart's desire in His gospel (1:17-18). The gospel is the good news, the glad tidings, to fallen mankind. The good news is *zoe*, the divine life, and this divine life is a person—Christ Himself as the complete God and the perfect man. In the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus declares something that no one in human history has ever declared: "I am...the life [*zoe*]" (14:6). Christ Himself is the divine life, the uncreated life, the eternal life, the indestructible, indissoluble life of God. John also tells us, "In Him was life [*zoe*], and the life [*zoe*] was the light of men" (1:4).

Christ is the life and in Him was life, but for God's purpose this is insufficient, because in fallen man there is no life. Fallen man has *bios*, the physical life, and he has *psuche*, the psychological life, but what fallen man lacks, what he needs, and what he must have to fulfill God's purpose is *zoe*, the divine life. Thus, in the Gospel of John,

the Lord Jesus told us His heart's desire and His expressed commission: "I have come that they may have life [*zoe*] and may have it abundantly" (10:10). God became a man that we might not only have life but also have it in plenitude. It is for this reason that in resurrection, Christ became the life-giving [*zoe*-giving] Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). When we receive Christ as our Savior, He gives life [*zoe*] to our entire tripartite being—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). When we repent of our sins and believe into Christ (John 3:15), He gives life to our spirit (Rom. 8:10). As we set our mind on the spirit, our mind becomes life (v. 6). As we further allow Him to indwell us, He gives life even to our mortal bodies (v. 11). Regeneration makes our spirit life, transformation makes our soul life, and glorification makes our body life. Thus, our entire tripartite being is swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:4).

It is precious to see that God became a man in order to die on the cross to redeem fallen mankind, but this is not the whole story according to John's Gospel. Redemption is God's judicial procedure to satisfy the righteous requirement of God. Life is for God's organic purpose to satisfy the heart's desire of God. The redemption Christ accomplished on the cross to satisfy the requirements of God's righteousness for our justification was so that He might impart Himself as life into us for our full salvation, an organic salvation that swallows up death in our entire being and makes us the same as Christ for God's eternal expression (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2). "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled" (Rom. 5:10). Notice the words *much more*. The Christian life is a "much more" life. Thank God for Christ's death on the cross that reconciled us to God, but there is much more. Christ died on the cross in order to release His life so that we might be saved in His life.

Christ's death accomplished many things for God and for us. Through His death, sin was taken away (John 1:29), Satan was destroyed (Heb. 2:14), the world was judged (John 12:31), the flesh and the self were crucified (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 2:20; 5:24), and the separating ordinances among mankind were abolished (Eph. 2:14-15). Also, shortly

before His death for our redemption, the Lord Jesus declared, “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The Lord likened Himself in His death to a grain of wheat. Just as a grain of wheat must die and resurrect in order to release and dispense its life to produce many grains, so Christ had to die and resurrect in order to release and dispense His life into His chosen ones to produce many sons of God. His death was a life-releasing death, and His resurrection was a life-dispensing resurrection. This resulted in a duplication of the one grain (the firstborn Son) into many grains (His many brothers) for the glorification of God (Rom. 8:29-30).

In His death on the cross, two substances were released from Christ’s side—blood and water (John 19:34). The signs of blood and water show forth God’s full salvation. His precious blood was for our redemption and for the purchasing of the church to be His possession (Eph. 1:7; Acts 20:28). His flowing life, signified by water, is for our transformation and the sanctifying of the church to be His bride (Eph. 5:25-27). Augustus Toplady put it well in his classic hymn: “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, / Let me hide myself in Thee; / Let the water and the blood, / From Thy riven side which flowed, / Be of sin the double cure, / Save me from its guilt and power” (*Hymns*, #1058). Christ’s priceless blood saves us from the guilt of sin, and His flowing life saves us from the power of sin. This “double cure” is the cure to all the ills of the universe. What good news this is, and how we need to experience and proclaim it! The blood which cleanses us from every sin brings us into the enjoyment of the divine life which swallows up all the death in our being to make us men of life, men of God who express God. The Gospel of John is the Gospel of life, the life which is the very person of Christ as the Spirit imparted into people to meet their every need, transform them, and build them up to become the spiritual house of the living God (1 Pet. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:15).

God’s Original Intention

In order to see the revelation of this Gospel of life, we need to see God’s original intention in the book of Genesis, since John reveals the fulfillment of this intention. God’s original intention according to His economy was that man should eat of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9, 16). The symbolism in Genesis of the tree of life finds its explanation and fulfillment in the Gospel of John. The tree of life typifies Christ, who imparts life to man and who pleases and satisfies man. In John’s Gospel, Christ is the vine tree and He is the life—the tree of life (15:5; 14:6). The fact that

Christ said in John 6 that He is the bread of life indicates that He has come to us as the tree of life in the form of food. In verse 35 the Lord Jesus said, “I am the bread of life,” and in verse 57 He said, “He who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.” This was a hard word for many of the Lord’s disciples, and from that time they “went back to what they left behind and no longer walked with Him” (v. 66). The Lord revealed, however, that He was not speaking of something in the physical realm when He said that He was the bread of life for people to eat. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life” (v. 63). The Lord as the Spirit who gives life is our spiritual food, and His words convey this food.

That God desires to be man’s spiritual food is seen in Genesis 2, which says that the tree of life is “good for food” (v. 9). In juxtaposition to the tree of life is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fact that God is our food, signified by the tree of life, means that we must depend on God continually. The tree of knowledge, on the other hand, indicates independence. One does not graduate from taking in food, but once one acquires a certain amount of knowledge, he can graduate from school. Once a person acquires the knowledge of his instructor, he does not need to depend on his instructor any longer, but because God is our spiritual food and the Giver of this food, we must depend on Him

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continually. This shows that the principle of the tree of life is the principle of dependence, whereas the principle of the tree of knowledge is the principle of independence. To be good, to do good, to worship God, or to work for God without depending on the living presence of God is the principle of independence, which is the central principle of nearly all religions. In the eyes of God, the greatest sin is not depending on Him, which is to be alienated, disconnected, and insulated from the life of God (Eph. 4:17-18). It is even possible to study the Scriptures in the principle of the tree of knowledge and thereby to have theology apart from and without “Theos,” God. This is what the Lord told the religionists of His day: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). Whenever we come to the Scriptures, we must come to Christ Himself as the tree of life, for He is the content and reality of the Scriptures.

The principle of the tree of life is the principle of utter and continual dependence on God, the principle of living constantly in direct contact with God. The boast of the apostle Paul was his dependence on God. He did not rely on his

fleshy wisdom to arrive at a solution to the sore difficulties and perplexities of his situation and environment: “For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you” (2 Cor. 1:12). To conduct ourselves in the grace of God is to live by Christ as the tree of life for our pleasure and satisfaction. It is to live in the singleness and sincerity of God, not in the duplicity and hypocrisy of man. Singleness, utter dependence on God, means simplicity. Life is simple; knowledge is complicated.

The seeker in Song of Songs, typifying the believer in Christ as the Lord’s loving seeker, is seen in her maturity as “leaning on her beloved” (8:5). The more we grow in Christ as life unto maturity, the more we realize our utter helplessness to be anything or do anything for the Lord. We must depend on Him for our very human existence, for our personal life, for our family life, and for our service to Him. We must have the attitude and prayer that King Jehoshaphat had when he and his people faced certain annihilation from their enemies: “O our God, . . . we do not know what to do; but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:12). Or we may be like King Asa, who became proud at the end of his days, and even in his disease he tragically relied on the physicians and not on God (16:12 Amplified). To rely on anything or anyone other than God is the principle of the tree of knowledge, the principle of independence from God. To rely on God in everything is the principle of the tree of life, the principle of dependence on God.

Christ as the tree of life is the center of the universe and the focal point of the entire Bible. Genesis 2 reveals that according to the purpose of God, the earth is the center of the universe, the garden of Eden is the center of the earth, and the tree of life is the center of the garden of Eden; hence, the universe is centered on the tree of life. Zechariah 12:1 says that God stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, and formed the spirit of man within him. The heavens are for the earth, and the earth is for man who has a spirit, which is for God. God placed this man in the garden of Eden before the tree of life with the intention that man, through the use of his spirit, would receive Him as life. The Old Testament begins with the tree of life (Gen. 2:9), and the New Testament ends with the tree of life (Rev. 22:2, 14). Thus, the thought of God being man’s life runs throughout the entire divine revelation.

Furthermore, God’s eternal desire for man to express Him in His image and rule in Him with His dominion can be realized only by God’s life; life is the way to fulfill God’s purpose. Genesis 1:26 says that God created man in His image and desired that this man would have dominion over

all the earth. Genesis 2 reveals that life is the way for this purpose to be accomplished. In Genesis 2 we see the picture of man placed before the tree of life in the garden of Eden with a flowing river, three precious materials, and a built-up bride (vv. 7-12, 22). This is a picture of God’s goal to have a built-up church, which will be Christ’s bride for His eternal expression and satisfaction (Matt. 16:18; Rev. 19:7; cf. Gen. 2:22). The Lord gains this by man’s partaking of Him, enjoying Him, and being filled with Him as the tree of life. As man enjoys Christ as life, life as a river flows within him and out of him, and man is transformed in life into precious materials for God’s building in life. Life conforms the believers to the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God and brings them into glory (Rom. 8:2, 6, 29; Col. 3:4). Furthermore, resurrection life brings in God’s authority for the believers to reign in life (Num. 17:8; Rom. 5:17; Rev. 20:4, 6). This is God’s original intention, and this intention is fully explicated in the Gospel of John. The following headings and major statements in this article are taken from Witness Lee’s masterful outline on the Gospel of John from the Recovery Version of the Bible (see pages 4 through 7 in this issue).

Life’s Principle

After John’s introductory word in chapter one, he speaks in chapter two concerning life’s principle and life’s purpose. Life’s principle is to change death into life, and the meaning of all the cases recorded in John correspond with the principle of the tree of life versus the tree of knowledge, the principle of life versus death. It should be pointed out that all the cases in John are not only miracles; even more they are signs, which are symbols with spiritual significance. John 2:11 says, “This beginning of signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed into Him.” We must also be aware of what the Lord said at the end of chapter two: “Many believed into His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus Himself did not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (vv. 23-25).

The people believed into the Lord because they saw the miracles He performed. The Lord could not commit Himself to such people. . . . This book is not for miraculous things but is only for life. This is why in this book even the miracles done by the Lord are called signs, signifying that the Lord came for life so that God might be multiplied (12:24), not for miracles so that man might be benefited. (Recovery Version, John 3:1, note 1)

John 2:1-11 speaks of the Lord’s first sign, the changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Eventually, “the wine ran out,” signifying that all of the enjoyment of human life, even the top enjoyment, runs

out; it is ephemeral and cannot last. When the wine of man's human life runs out, that is the time for the Lord to come in. "The third day" signifies a time of resurrection, since the Lord was raised from death on the third day. The Lord instructed the servants to take six stone waterpots and fill them with water to the brim. Then He told them to draw some out and take it to the master of the feast, who told the bridegroom that, anomalously, he had kept the good wine until the end of the feast, instead of serving it at the beginning. The servants knew, however, that the water had been changed into wine. The number six in this story signifies man, who was created on the sixth day (Gen. 1:27, 31), and the water in this context signifies death (vv. 2, 6; Exo. 14:21; Matt. 3:16). Due to the fall, created man has been filled with death, the source of which is Satan (Heb. 2:14). But when the resurrected Christ visits and appears to fallen man, He changes death into life. Man's inward being, which was filled with death, is swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:4). This is life's principle. Wherever Christ as life is, death is changed into life.

Life's Purpose

John 2:12-22 reveals life's purpose. The purpose of life is to build the house of God. When the Bible speaks of the house of God, it is not speaking of a physical building or a material dwelling place. God's house is a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5), and this house is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15). A great dispensational change took place in John 2. Up until that time, the house of God was the material temple built in Jerusalem. But the Dweller of this house became a man, and this man became the house of God. In John 1 He is revealed as the real tabernacle of God—"the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (v. 14). In John 2 He is revealed as the real temple of God (vv. 20-21). After the Lord cleansed the physical temple by driving out the moneychangers, He said, "Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise" (v. 16). His disciples then remembered that it was written of Him in Psalm 69:9 that the zeal of God's house would devour Him (John 2:17). In His answer to His opposers' and skeptics' challenge to show them a sign, He responded in verses 19 through 22,

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then the Jews said, This temple was built in forty-six years, and You will raise it up in three days? But He spoke of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

At that point in human history the Lord was declaring that God no longer dwelt in the physical temple in Jerusalem. God now dwelt in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. As the apostle Paul writes, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). This refers not only to the physical body of Jesus in incarnation but also and forever to His spiritual and glorified body in resurrection (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:44). The Lord Jesus prophesied that when His physical body, "this temple," was destroyed on the cross, it would be raised up after three days, referring to His resurrection from the dead. Not only did His physical body become a spiritual body of glory in resurrection, but also the temple of His physical body became the temple of the mystical Body of Christ, composed of all of His believers. Thus, Paul tells us that the believers in Christ as the corporate Body of Christ, the church, are the temple of the living God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16). Life's purpose, Christ's purpose, was to die on the cross for the destruction of His physical body so that He could produce and build up His mystical Body, the corporate house of God, in resurrection. Life's purpose is to build the house of God for His eternal dwelling, satisfaction, and expression.

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Life Meeting the Need of Every Man's Case

John 2:23—11:57 reveals that Christ as life meets the need of every man's case. The need of the moral is life's regenerating (2:23—3:36). The need of the immoral is life's satisfying (4:1-42). The need of the dying is life's healing (vv. 43-54). The need of the impotent is life's enlivening (5:1-47). The need of the hungry is life's feeding (6:1-71). The need of the thirsty is life's quenching (7:1-52). The need of those under the bondage of sin is life's setting free (v. 53—8:59). The need of the blind in religion is life's sight and life's shepherding (9:1—10:42). Consummately, the need of the dead is life's resurrecting (11:1-57). Jesus said and did so many things in His short life, but John chose the above cases to reveal something particular. At the end of his Gospel, John said, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself could contain the books written" (21:25). Out of all that the Lord Jesus did, the nine cases spoken of in John 2:23—11:57 were chosen by the Holy Spirit in a specific way to show that all men—moral, immoral, dying, impotent, hungry, thirsty, sin-bound, blind, and dead—need life, *zoe*, Christ.

The Need of the Moral—Life's Regenerating

The case of Nicodemus in John 3 shows us that an outwardly moral man, a good man, a revered man, a dignified

man, is in need of life's regenerating. This was the case of Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews (v. 1). The Lord told this seeking man that he needed to be born anew by receiving the divine, eternal life (vv. 3-5, 15). When we were born of man, we were generated with the human life. When we are born of God, we are regenerated with the divine life. Regeneration is the receiving of another life, the divine life, in addition to our human life. The Lord told Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (v. 6). When a person receives Christ as his life and Savior, he is born anew in his spirit with the divine Spirit. According to the prophecy of the new covenant in Ezekiel 36:26-27, we are given a new spirit and God puts His Spirit within us. Our spirit is now a spirit of sonship, and the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:15-16). Even more, the divine Spirit dwells in our human spirit, and these two are mingled together to be one spirit. "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). This is the miracle of regeneration, the miracle of being vivified with the life of Christ to become a son of God.

The Lord went on to show, in His discourse with Nicodemus, how the regeneration of fallen man is accomplished and how it takes place. In revealing this profound matter, the Lord referred Nicodemus to the account of the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness in Numbers 21:4-9. Due to their rebellion against God, the children of Israel came under God's judgment and were bitten by fiery serpents to cause many of them to die. Moses prayed to God, and God instructed him to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole so that whoever looked at this bronze serpent would live. The Lord Jesus alluded to this in a remarkable way by saying, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).

Fallen men have been "bitten" by the real serpent, the devil, and are constituted with the poison of sin. As a result, men have a sinful, serpentine nature, making them the children of the devil, even the "offspring of vipers" (1 John 3:10; Matt. 3:7). The good news is that the poison of sin was annulled and taken away on the cross by the death of Christ as the reality of the bronze serpent (bronze indicating the judgment of God). Just as the bronze serpent is in the likeness of a serpent without the poison of the serpent, so Christ came in the likeness of the flesh of sin without the sin of the flesh. He came in the likeness of the flesh of sin and condemned sin in the flesh by crucifying the flesh of sin on the cross (Rom. 8:3). "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). At the time of Christ's death, God caused the iniquity of fallen mankind to fall on Him (Isa. 53:5-6), and at that moment

He was made sin on our behalf for the termination of sin by His precious death. When we look at this One, the crucified Christ, by believing into Him, the termination of our sinful nature with the forgiveness of our sins is applied to us, and we receive Him as the eternal life of God to be born of God. We are then healed in our inward being from the poison of sin, which is swallowed by His life. Thank the Lord that He "bore up our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose bruise you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

The great revelation of Christ dying in the likeness of the flesh of sin as the bronze serpent in order to terminate man's fallen and sinful nature and take away the sin of the world is revealed in His conversation with Nicodemus. In doing so, the Lord also indicated that seemingly moral and religious people, who try to live according to the law of God, need to realize that they have the poison of sin within them. The only antidote to this poison is the crucified and resurrected Christ as the divine life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life" (John 3:16). This eternal life is a person, Jesus Christ (14:6). Our believing into Him is our receiving Him as the divine life to be born a second time, born of the Spirit to have the life of God in our spirit. This new birth is for the purpose of all the regenerated people becoming the bride of Christ for the increase of Christ (3:29-30).

The Need of the Immoral—Life's Satisfying

Whereas John 3 shows that the need of the moral is life's regenerating, John 4 reveals that the need of the immoral is life's satisfying. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these two cases are juxtaposed to show that all men, from the very moral to the extremely immoral, need Christ as the embodiment of the life of God. The woman encountered by the Lord in John 4 previously had five husbands and was presently living with a man who was not her husband (vv. 17-18). She is a stark contrast to the upright Nicodemus, but the need of both and the need of all fallen men are the same—the divine life.

John 4 shows that people live in sin because they are dissatisfied. They try one "husband" after another, but no "husband" can satisfy them. Only one Husband satisfies, the Christ of God. The real ministry in the New Testament is to betroth people to Christ so that He might become their real Husband (2 Cor. 11:2). Such a Husband becomes our eternal source of supply and satisfaction, our living water. This woman, who had come to a well to draw water, was offered the living water of the life-giving Christ, who is the gift of God (John 4:10). Everyone who drinks of the water of this world for satisfaction will thirst again in dissatisfaction, but whoever drinks of the water

that Christ gives will by no means thirst forever. The Lord said, “The water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life” (v. 14). When we receive Christ as our God-Savior, He is installed within us as an eternal fountain of living water. Our Triune God is the fountain within us as the Father, the source of life; the fountain springing up within us as the Son, the manifestation of life; and the river flowing out of us as the Spirit, the flowing of life.

John 4 shows how we can drink of the flowing God for our daily satisfaction. First, we can confess our sins to the Lord in our fellowship with Him. When we contact God in our personal times with Him, He enlightens and exposes to us our sins and our idols. An idol is anything that becomes a substitute for Christ and that replaces Christ as the preeminent One in our lives. Anything that we seek to satisfy us other than Christ can become an idol to us. In Jeremiah’s word, this is to forsake the Lord as the fountain of living waters and to hew out for ourselves broken cisterns which hold no water (Jer. 2:13). Each husband of the woman in John 4 had become an idol, a broken cistern of dissatisfaction. In our fellowship with the Lord and under His inward enlightenment, we can repent of and confess our sins, returning to Him as the fountain of living waters. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Our confession along with His forgiving and cleansing cause life to flow within us once more. The Lord again has a way to spring up within us as the eternal fountain of water.

Another way to drink of Christ as the living water revealed in John 4 is to worship God in spirit and truthfulness. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness” (v. 24). We need to notice both the divine Spirit and the human spirit in this verse. We worship God, who is Spirit, with and in our spirit. The real worship of God is to have a living contact with God in our spirit and by the exercise of our spirit. Our regenerated spirit is the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22). According to the typology of the Old Testament, God could be worshiped only in His dwelling place, His temple, and with the offerings. To worship God in His dwelling place today is to worship Him in our spirit. To worship God with the offerings today is enjoy Christ as the reality of all the Old Testament offerings (Heb. 10:5-10). He is the unique sin offering to deal with our sinful nature, the trespass offering to take away the sins of our conduct, the burnt offering to be our absoluteness for God, the meal offering to be the divine attributes filling our human virtues, and the peace offering to be our peace

toward God and man (Lev. 1—7). When we apply Him as the reality of all the offerings, He becomes our genuineness and sincerity for the true worship of God. Such worship in spirit and truthfulness is the worship that God seeks and is the real drinking of Christ as the living water.

The Need of the Dying—Life’s Healing

After the revelation of life’s satisfying the need of the immoral, there is the unveiling of the need of the dying—life’s healing (John 4:43-54). A royal official beseeched the Lord for the healing of his dying son. “Jesus said to him, Go, your son lives. The man believed the word which Jesus said to him and went his way” (v. 50). When the man returned home, his slaves told him that his child was living and also that the child had become well in the very hour that the Lord Jesus said to him, “Your son lives” (v. 53). This man received the healing for his child by the Lord’s life-giving word. In the light of this case, we need to realize that all of us are dying. Each day that we live is a day closer to our death. Furthermore, in our fallen being we are all sick with sin. Even though a person who is regenerated has the divine life in his spirit, his soul (composed of the mind, emotion, and will) still is fallen and needs to be transformed. Our mind, emotion, and will as well as our physical body need daily healing and saving by the fresh infusion of Christ as life.

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We can receive this life-giving infusion by contacting the Lord in His Word day by day. We need to take heed to the Lord’s instructions of wisdom in Proverbs: “My son, be attentive to my words; / Incline your ear to my sayings, / Do not let them depart from your sight; / Keep them in the midst of your heart. / For they are life to those who find them, / And healing to all their flesh” (4:20-22). We need to ask the Lord for an ear to hear what He is speaking and always keep His Word before us. We must come to the Word day by day to read it prayerfully. The Bible is the constant, written word, the *logos* (Gk.), containing Christ as the living Word, the living *Logos*. When we come to Christ in the Scriptures and exercise our spirit to pray over them, the constant word becomes the Lord’s instant and present word to us. This instant word in the Greek is *rhema*, a personalized word to us from the Lord with the written word of the Bible. The Lord’s personal speaking to us is life and medicine to us and to those for whom we pray (John 6:63). Life’s healing to those who are dying is by His pure and medicinal words of life.

The Need of the Impotent—Life’s Enlivening

After speaking of life’s healing, John goes on to speak of

life's enlivening, which is the need of the impotent, the powerless (5:1-47). John 5 tells us that there was a multitude of those who were sick laying around the pool of Bethesda, which was near the Sheep Gate, waiting for an angel to come and stir up the water, for whoever was the first to step into the pool after the stirring of the water was made well. But what if one did not have the strength to step in first? Such a one was powerless, helpless, and had no way to be healed. Jesus saw a certain man there who had been in his sickness for thirty-eight years because he had no way to fulfill the requirements for being healed. "When Jesus saw this one lying there and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, Do you want to get well? The sick man answered Him, Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me. Jesus said to him, Rise, take up your mat and walk. And immediately the man became well, and he took up his mat and walked" (vv. 6-9).

This case is a picture of the man in the flesh in Romans 7, the one who wills to do good again and again according to the standard of the law but is overpowered by his weakness to fail again and again. The Sheep Gate in the proximity of the pool of Bethesda signifies the entrance into the law keeping of the religious system of Judaism (John 10:9). The mention of the angel in John 5 is an allusion to the law, which was ordained through angels (Gal. 3:19). *Bethesda* means "house of mercy" and signifies that all those who are under the bondage of the law, those who are wretched, hopeless, and powerless to fulfill its requirements, are in need of the Lord's mercy. When man realizes his complete wretchedness and inability to save himself, the Lord has a way to enliven him (Rom. 7:24). The means of enlivening is, once again, the Lord's life-giving word. "Truly, truly, I say to you, An hour is coming, and it is now, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). A footnote to John 5:7 tells us the intrinsic significance of the impotent man's healing by the Lord of life:

There was a means for healing in the religion of law keeping, but it did not profit the impotent man, because he had no strength to fulfill the law's requirements. The law keeping in religion depends on man's effort, man's doing, man's self-cultivation. Since man is impotent, the law keeping in religion becomes ineffective. The holy city, the holy temple, the feast, the Sabbath, the angels, Moses, and the Scriptures are all good things of this religion, but they could do nothing for this impotent man. In the eyes of the Lord he was a dead person (v. 25), in need not only of healing but also of enlivening. With the Lord's enlivening there is no requirement. The impotent man heard His voice and was enlivened (v. 25). (Recovery Version, note 2)

The Need of the Hungry—Life's Feeding

The Lord not only enlivens the powerless ones but also meets the need of the hungry. John 6 reveals that this need is life's feeding. After the miraculous feeding of a great multitude, the Lord spoke of the true food that all men need—the spiritual food that feeds the hunger of man's inner being with eternal life. The multitude, in their amazement at this great miracle, wanted to make the Lord their King, but He withdrew from them (v. 15). He did not come to be a great ruler to rule man outwardly, but to be "small" eternal food to rule man inwardly. He revealed Himself to the hungry people as the bread out of heaven, the true bread (v. 32), the bread of God (v. 33), the bread of life (vv. 35, 48), and the living bread (v. 51). Just as the children of Israel ate the manna in the wilderness for their daily sustenance, the Lord charged His followers to eat Him as their spiritual food:

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. (vv. 54-57)

The Lord's speaking in John 6 must be interpreted spiritually according to the divine revelation of the holy Scriptures. Of course, the Lord was not speaking of anything in the physical realm when He charged us to eat Him. When we believed into Him, our believing was our receiving of Him as the eternal life into our being. He who has the Son has the life (1 John 5:11-12; John 1:12-13). We can compare John 3:36—"He who believes into the Son has eternal life"—with John 6:54—"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life." This shows that to believe into the Son is to eat the Lord's flesh and drink the Lord's blood. To eat the Lord's flesh and drink His blood is to receive by faith all that the Lord did in giving His body and in shedding His blood for us on the cross. His physical body was broken on the cross for us, and in resurrection He was transferred into the divine and mystical realm of resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, who is the bread of life for us to receive, for us to eat. His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins in order to redeem us back to God. When we believe into Him, both of these realities become ours in His very person as our new life. This is the true significance of partaking of the symbols at the Lord's table. To eat the bread is to participate in the victory of the life of Christ, and to drink the cup is to joy in the accomplishment of the blood of Christ (Matt. 26:26-29).

Eating the Lord as our spiritual food, though, does not stop with our initial believing. Indeed as the Lord said, "He who

eats Me, he also shall live because of Me” (John 6:57). Eating the Lord is a daily matter of our ongoing Christian living. Just as physical food gives us physical life, spiritual food gives us divine life. This spiritual food is the Lord Himself as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). Christ as our spiritual food is conveyed by His words to us, which are spirit and life (John 6:63). Thus, to eat the Lord is to receive Him as the Spirit by eating His words. “Your words were found and I ate them” (Jer. 15:16). “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Just as the children of Israel ate the heavenly manna for their daily sustenance in the wilderness, so we must eat the Lord as the living bread out of heaven, the true bread, for our daily spiritual sustenance in the wilderness of this world.

All the characteristics related to the manna seen in the Old Testament are the characteristics of Christ as our spiritual food. The manna which rained from heaven to feed the Israelites could not be stored for future use (except for the Sabbath). When the children of Israel attempted this, “it bred worms and stank” (Exo. 16:20). Just as the children of Israel had to gather the manna day by day, so we have to “gather” Christ day by day. Indeed, the Christian life is a day-by-day life. We need to feed on Christ through His word in order to be renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). We need to maintain our spiritual freshness and newness by contacting and enjoying the living Christ morning by morning. The manna in the wilderness came with the morning dew (Exo. 16:13-14), and Christ as the heavenly manna comes to us with His new mercies and fresh grace (Lam. 3:22-23; Heb. 4:16). Also, Exodus tells us that the manna had to be gathered early in the morning. “And they gathered it morning by morning, each one according to his eating; and when the sun became hot, it melted” (16:21). There is a spiritual principle here of the believers’ needing to enjoy Christ as their spiritual food early in the morning, “before the sun becomes hot,” that is, before the onset of the heat of our daily affairs and burning trials in our environment. We need to give Christ the first place in our lives by contacting Him in His Word as the first thing we do in the morning. He should be the first One whom we contact each day, and His word should be the first thing we take in each day to be fed with the bread of God to satisfy our daily hunger.

The Need of the Thirsty—Life’s Quenching

The hungry in John 6 needed life’s feeding, and the thirsty in John 7 needed life’s quenching. The Lord revealed this at the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a time of great joy for the Jewish people. But on the last day of this feast,

“Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (vv. 37-38). With all human joyous occasions, there is always a last day. This last day always exposes the thirst in man for true meaning and purpose. Christ as life is crying out to all the thirsty ones—“Come to Me and drink.” He is not only our spiritual food, the bread of life, but also our spiritual drink, the water of life. This points back again to the typology of the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness. As the apostle Paul points out concerning them, “All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:3-4). In the wilderness the Lord instructed Moses to strike the rock with his staff, and it would gush forth with water for the people to drink (Exo. 17:5-6). This is a picture of Christ being smitten and cleft on the cross by the authority of God’s righteous law for the judgment of sin. He was smitten in crucifixion so that He could flow out in resurrection as the living water to quench the thirst of His chosen ones.

*Just as the children of Israel
ate the heavenly manna,
so we must eat the Lord as the living
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When the children of Israel thirsted again, the Lord told Moses not to strike the rock but to speak to the rock that it might yield its water (Num. 20:8). Now that Christ has been crucified for us, there is no need for Him to be smitten again. As the resurrected One

He is the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. In order to enjoy the dispensing of the water of life into our inner being, we need only to speak to Him, to talk to Him. We need to build up the habit of speaking to the Lord, not only in our private and set times of prayer but also throughout the course of our day. In our speaking to Him we can simply call upon His name; no man can say “Lord Jesus” except in the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). Also, whoever calls upon the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21), and He is rich to all who call upon His name (Rom. 10:12-13). To call is to cry out to Him aloud, to invoke His person.

It is God’s commandment (Psa. 50:15; Jer. 29:12) and desire (Psa. 91:15; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 13:9) that His people call on Him. This is the joyful way to drink from the fountain of God’s salvation (Isa. 12:3-4) and the enjoyable way to delight oneself in God (Job 27:10), that is, to enjoy Him. Hence, God’s people must call upon Him daily (Psa. 88:9). (Recovery Version, Acts 2:21, note 1)

In addition to calling upon Him, we can also speak to Him about all the affairs, cares, worries, trials, and joy in our lives. This is to open to Him in real prayer, speaking to Him as the indwelling Rock so that He may dispense

Himself into us as the pure stream of life. The Psalms are filled with such speaking to the Lord, as seen in the subtitle to Psalm 102: "A Prayer of an afflicted one, when he is fainting and pours out his complaint before Jehovah." It is one thing to complain, and it is entirely another thing to pour out our complaint before Jehovah. As we open our inner being to the Lord in our crying out to Him, He is able to impart Himself into us with His feelings, desires, intents, and compassions. "O Jehovah, hear my prayer; / And let my cry come unto You. / Do not hide Your face from me / On the day of my distress; / Incline Your ear to me; / On the day when I call out, answer me quickly" (vv. 1-2). Such an audible crying to the Lord in our affliction as seen in Psalm 102 issues in our blessing the Lord with all that is within us in Psalm 103. To bless the Lord is to speak well of the Lord, to praise Him, extol Him, adore Him, love Him, and thank Him for all that He has done, is doing, and will do for us to satisfy His heart's desire.

Bless Jehovah, O my soul; / And all that is within me, bless His holy name. / Bless Jehovah, O my soul; / And do not forget all His benefits: / He pardons all your iniquities; / He heals all your diseases; / He redeems your life from the pit; / He crowns you with lovingkindness and compassions; / He satisfies the prime of your life with good, / So that your youth is renewed like the eagle. (vv. 1-5)

Our praise of the Lord in such a way is our reverential and exultant speaking to Him for us to enjoy Him as the flowing river within us.

The Lord's promise in John 7:38-39 for those who come to Him to drink is that rivers of living water will also flow out of their innermost being. The words *drink* and *flow* are very important in this passage. In order to drink we have to allow the Lord to flow. To illustrate this we may use the example of a hose. The way that we can tell if a hose is "drinking" water is by seeing if it is flowing out water. If we are those who allow the Lord to flow out of our innermost being, we will be drinking of Him, since drinking and flowing out are inseparable. The more we allow the Lord to flow out of us, the more He will flow into us. For rivers of living water to flow out of our innermost being is for us to minister Christ as life to others for their salvation and to minister Christ as the life supply to God's children for their growth in life. The early apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). Real prayer is our coming to the Lord and drinking of Him as the living water to be filled with Him. The genuine ministry of the word is the flowing out of the Spirit as rivers of living water from our innermost being into God's chosen ones to quench their spiritual thirst. Prayer is to drink of the Spirit. The ministry of the word is to flow out the Spirit. By this drinking and flowing, we can be one with the Lord as life in His desire to fill His chosen ones with Himself for His glorious expression.

The Need of Those under the Bondage of Sin— Life's Setting Free

John 8 continues by revealing how the Lord as the divine life can set people free from the bondage of sin. While He was teaching in the temple, the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Him caught in the act of adultery and challenged Him to tell them what to do with her. They said that Moses commanded them to stone such a woman. He responded by saying, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7). When they heard this, they departed, and "Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (vv. 10-11). Only Jesus has the authority to condemn and forgive sins. "He who is without sin among you" is Jesus. This woman's accusers were ready to stone her, but the One without sin among them, the only One qualified to condemn her, did not have a stone in His hand. Instead, as the incarnated God, He forgave her and told her to go and sin no more.

But how can one sin no more? In His discourse following this incident with the adulterous woman, the Lord revealed how He as the divine life can set people free from the bondage of sin. This One can set people free from sin by being the light of the world and the Giver of the light of life. "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (v. 12). Those under the bondage of sin can enjoy life's setting free by following the Lord as the light of the world. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:4-5). Light is the presence of God, and this divine presence is Christ Himself as the Spirit indwelling His believers to make them also "the light of the world" as His shining duplication in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation (Matt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15).

Christ as the divine life also sets people free from the bondage of sin by being the "I Am" (John 8:24, 28, 58). The most remarkable statement by the man Jesus is at the end of John 8. The opposing religionists said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I am" (vv. 57-58). His opposers violently reacted to this because they knew He was saying that He was the eternal, ever-existing God. They knew from the book of Exodus that the One who appeared to and sent Moses to release God's people from Pharaoh and the bondage of Egypt was the "I Am," the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:14-15). This One appeared to Moses as a flame of fire in a thornbush. This divine flame, the great I Am, is the One who can free us from the bondage of sin.

There is an eternal fire burning within every regenerated believer, a fire that always was, is, and will be. This fire of the divine life was released through the Lord's death, as the Lord prophesied in Luke 12: "I have come to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am pressed until it is accomplished!" (vv. 49-50). Baptism here refers to the Lord's death on the cross. He was pressed, constrained, in His flesh, to fulfill His divine commission to die on the cross as a grain of wheat so that His unlimited, divine life might be released from within Him into His believers. The release of this life was His casting fire on the earth. The fire of Christ as life, the great I Am, is burning within the believers and continues to spread all over the earth to free God's chosen ones from sin's bondage.

This One freed us from the slavery of sin not only by being lifted up on the cross but also by being the truth, the reality. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). "If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed" (v. 36). "I am...the reality" (14:6). In resurrection He became the Spirit of truth to guide us into the truth by His word, which is also the truth, the reality (17:17).

When the Lord as the great I Am comes into us as life, He shines within us as light, bringing the divine element as reality into us. This reality, which is the divine element imparted into us and realized by us, sets us free from the bondage of sin by the divine life as the light of man. (Recovery Version, John 8:32, note 1)

Many think of the truth as being synonymous with doctrine, but the truth is a person who is imparted into us. The truth is the divine light shining on the facts in the Bible to impart a living revelation of the Son of God within us. As God's Son is revealed in us by our looking away unto Him, the reality of His person sets us free from the sin which so easily entangles us (Heb. 12:1-2).

The Need of the Blind in Religion— Life's Sight and Life's Shepherding

The divine life as the divine light opens our eyes to see Christ and shepherds us out of empty religion into the enjoyment of Christ as the green pasture. This is the significance of John 9 and 10, which speak of a man who was blind from birth having his eyes opened by Christ as the light of the world. The Lord did something unusual to open this man's eyes: "He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed his eyes with the clay, and He said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is interpreted, Sent). He went therefore and washed and came

away seeing" (9:6-7). Clay signifies humanity, since man was made as an earthen, or clay, vessel (Rom. 9:21; also, the Hebrew word *adam*, the word for "man" in Genesis 1:26, means "red clay"). Spittle, as something proceeding out of the Lord's mouth, signifies the Lord's words as spirit and life (Matt. 4:4; John 6:63). When our humanity is mingled and anointed with the Lord's speaking, with Himself as the speaking Spirit, our eyes are opened and we receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see Him (Eph. 1:17). Once we see Him, we can never be the same. Just like the healed blind man in John 9, we may not be able to give doctrinal or theological reasons for our sight of Christ in our conversion, but we can testify as he did, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (v. 25).

The blind man's sight caused him to be driven out of the religious system through the Lord as the door and to the Lord as the good Shepherd, the One who leads His followers out of every religious fold into the abundance of the green pasture of the divine life. The Lord said, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved and shall go in and go out and shall find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal and kill and destroy; I have come

that they may have life and may have it abundantly. I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (10:9-11). Shepherding is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John. It is by the Lord's shepherding that He

imparts Himself as life into His people to meet their every need and build them up to be the house of God, the church of the living God. The Gospel of John concludes with His shepherding of Peter to restore him to the divine fellowship and His charging Peter to shepherd His sheep (21:15-17). Peter was so impressed with this that he spoke of it in his first Epistle, charging his fellow elders to shepherd the flock of God so that they might be rewarded by Christ as the Chief Shepherd in the age to come (5:1-4).

Christ's shepherding is His cherishing and nourishing (Eph. 5:29). He cherishes people as the Son of Man in His humanity and nourishes them as the Son of God in His divinity. To cherish people is to nurture and foster them with tender care, to comfort them; simply put, it is to make people happy, to cheer them up. Such cheering comes from the Lord's resurrected presence. His presence is the cheering and charming factor which opens people up to receive His nourishing, His dispensing of Himself into them as the divine life. God's entire New Testament economy is actually Christ as the Son of Man cherishing us and as the Son of God nourishing us. Christ as the Son of Man redeeming us from sin is His cherishing (1 Tim. 1:15). Christ as the Son of God dispensing the divine life

into us abundantly is His nourishing (John 10:10). Christ as the Son of Man coming down to man's level to contact man in love and mercy is His cherishing. Christ as the Son of God speaking words of spirit and life to dispense Himself into people is His nourishing. We have seen that in order to free the adulterous woman in John 8 from the bondage of sin, the Lord first cherished her in His humanity by granting her His forgiveness and telling her that He did not condemn her. Then He nourished her in His divinity by enabling her to live a life free from the bondage of sin by following Him as the light of the world, believing into Him as the great I Am, and knowing Him as the divine reality by abiding in His life-imparting word. The Lord's charge to Peter in John 21 is His charge to all His believers—to be one with Him as the good Shepherd, shepherding His sheep in His cherishing humanity and nourishing them in His life-imparting divinity.

The Need of the Dead—Life's Resurrecting

John consummates his speaking of Christ as life meeting the need of every man's case with life's resurrecting meeting the need of the dead in John 11. This chapter is the account of the death of Lazarus, whose sisters were Mary and Martha. They were all ones whom the Lord loved. Inexplicably to human understanding, when the Lord heard that Lazarus was sick, He remained in the place where He was for two days, and then He asked His disciples to go with Him to Bethany to wake Lazarus out of his sleep, which was death. According to our natural sympathy, we would spontaneously visit a loved one who was very ill. We would not remain in the place where we were until our loved one had died. But resurrection waits for death, because resurrection is not merely life, but life that has passed through death. Resurrection needs death in order to be manifested, and death cannot hold the resurrection life. "Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21), but Jesus said to Martha, "Your brother will rise again" (v. 23). According to Martha's concept in her objective knowledge, she said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day" (v. 24). But Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25). With the Lord Jesus it is not "he will rise" but "I am the resurrection." Resurrection is not an episodic act—resurrection is a person. When Jesus is present, resurrection is present. Furthermore, Jesus is the I Am; He is the present tense. He is the "now" Christ, the "today" Christ. When they took away the stone from the tomb of Lazarus at the command of Jesus, "He cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out! And he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with cloths, and his face was bound about with a handkerchief. Jesus said to them, Loose him and let him go" (vv. 43-44).

In our Christian experience and circumstances and in our serving the Lord, we are at times brought into a death

tomb. Paul described such an experience by saying, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living. Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8-9). According to the Lord's leading, we can be brought into situations that are "beyond our power." This is so that we would learn not to trust in ourselves but in the resurrecting God. In our daily lives we may unconsciously depend upon ourselves for many things. We depend upon our natural strength, our natural ability, our natural wisdom, or our natural attributes. But the Lord will sovereignly allow us to pass through situations in which we are unbearably weighed down so that we are brought into despair. In our despair we become very truthful and honest with God because we desperately need Him to be our strength, power, ability, life, and person in a situation with which only He can cope. In such situations the Lord has a way to tear down every aspect of our natural being and rebuild and remodel us inwardly with Himself as life. In the booklet entitled "The God of Resurrection," Witness Lee speaks of the significance of suffering in the life of the believer:

What is the significance of suffering? This, that the devastation it brings to the old creation provides an opportunity for the God of resurrection to impart Himself to His creatures, so that they emerge from the death process with a divine element in their constitution. The primary purpose of suffering in this universe, particularly as it relates to the children of God, is that through it the very nature of God may be wrought into the nature of man. "But though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." Through a process of outward decay an inward process is taking place that is adding a new constituent to our lives.

Beloved brothers and sisters, through hardship and pressure a divine element is being wrought into the very fabric of our beings, so that we cease to be colorless Christians, but have a heavenly hue imparted to our lives that was lacking before. Whatever else suffering may effect in this universe is incidental; this is primary—to bring those whom the living God has made possessors of created life into the uncreated life of the God of resurrection. It is in the death experiences which come through suffering that the life of the creature is blended with the life of the Creator. We may know the living God without such drastic experiences, but only through death can we come to an experimental knowledge of the God of resurrection. (15-17)

As we contact the Lord in our trials by calling on Him, crying out to Him, and praying to Him, He has a way to work Himself into our mind, emotion, and will for our

genuine transformation with Himself as the divine life. As we stay in fellowship with the resurrection, Christ Himself, He gradually transforms our mind with the thoughts of God, our emotions with the feelings of God, and our will with the intents of God. This is so that we would not only have the resurrection life indwelling us but also that we may have Him imparting Himself abundantly into all the parts of our inward being to transform and conform us to His image (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29).

Life's Issue—A House of Feasting

The issue of all of our experience of Christ as life is to arrive at God's goal—the church, God's building (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:9). In the Gospel of John the church is revealed in chapter fourteen as the Father's house and in chapter fifteen as the vine tree with the believers as the branches. But this spiritual house and organic vine have a practical manifestation, and this manifestation is seen in John 12. John 12 provides a wonderful picture of the genuine church life, the Body life, described by Paul in Romans 12 as the perfect will of God. When we enjoy Christ as our life and life supply in all of His varied aspects revealed in John 2:23—11:57, the issue is the genuine church life as a house of feasting in John 12.

The genuine church life which was realized after Pentecost was practiced in the homes of the believers. They met, broke bread, and did everything “from house to house” (Acts 2:46; 20:20). Their homes were homes of feasting, that is, homes where they kept the real feast of Christ as their unleavened bread, a feast of fellowship with the Lord and with one another, a feast of enjoying Christ mutually in a way which was absolutely pure, without mixture, and full of reality (1 Cor. 5:7).

Jude refers to the meetings of the early believers as “love feasts” (v. 12), feasts motivated by and filled with the love of God. The love feast in John 12 was in the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3). Leprosy signifies the sin that comes from rebellion against God (cf. Num. 12:1-2, 10). All of God's redeemed ones are cleansed lepers, cleansed sinners, as Simon was. In his home there was Jesus, as the central figure, with Martha, Lazarus, and Mary. Lazarus had just been raised from the dead in John 11, and here he was in a home meeting testifying of the victory of the Lord's resurrection life in his very being. The presence of Lazarus testified of Christ as the resurrection. In this meeting we see Lazarus testifying, Martha serving, and Mary loving. This is a genuine home meeting, comprised of believers who are enjoying the presence of Christ as the resurrection, serving one another in love, and loving the Lord supremely.

Mary loved the Lord so much that she “took a pound of ointment, of very valuable pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment” (John 12:3). In the genuine church life the homes of the believers are filled with the fragrance of people loving the Lord by pouring out their lives and treasures on the Lord for His interests on earth. This is not a sacrifice for them but a joyous privilege and a testimony of the Lord's inestimable preciousness. John Nelson Darby, whose synopsis of the Bible has been of great help to many students of the Bible, said, “Oh, the joy of having nothing and being nothing, seeing nothing but a living Christ in glory, and being careful for nothing but His interests down here” (Weremchuk 7). This is the joy described among the believers in John 12, where they practiced the church life as the issue of life and as the carrying out of the goal of God to have the reality of the Body of Christ.

In such a church life, which is filled with the enjoyment of Christ as life, the Body of Christ is built up for His expression, and the believers are reigning in life for the crushing of Satan under their feet (Rom. 16:20), thus fulfilling God's original intention. This practice of the Body life, the church life, in the homes of the believers for the expression and declaration of Christ as life is the real gospel. In Matthew's account the Lord Jesus declared, “Truly I say to you, Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her” (26:13). The gospel is not only the story of the Lord loving us but also the story of us loving the Lord. May this gospel of enjoying Christ as life meeting our every need, issuing in a feast of loving Him as the preeminent One, spread throughout the whole earth to be both our memorial and an eternal memorial to our God in the building up of the church, consummating in the New Jerusalem as the ultimate building of God in man and man in God. **AFC**

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is the real gospel. The gospel is not
only the story of the Lord loving us but
also the story of us loving the Lord.*

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