

# Spiritual Life: The Sentence of Death

by Stephen Kaung

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*Stephen Kaung's sermon emphasizes that the acceptance of the 'sentence of death' is essential for experiencing true spiritual life and reliance on God's grace.*

**Duration:** 53:36

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 1:3

**Topics:** "Spiritual Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of the 'sentence of death' and its application to our spiritual lives. He explains that the sentence of death refers to a judicial decision that proclaims death as the end of everything. The speaker emphasizes that true spiritual life is resurrection life, emerging from death. He uses the example of Job, who experienced the glory of God under the sentence of death. The speaker also mentions three things in our natural life that oppose the grace of God: human energy, fleshly wisdom, and self-glory. Overall, the sermon highlights the importance of understanding and accepting the sentence of death in order to experience true spiritual life.

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## Transcript

Will you please turn to 2nd Corinthians, the second letter to the Corinthians, chapter one. 2nd Corinthians, chapter one. We'll read from verse three through verse twelve.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to encourage those who are in any tribulation whatever, through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged of God. Because even as the suffering of the Christ abounds towards us, so through the Christ does our encouragement also abound. But whether we are in tribulation, it is for your encouragement and salvation, wrought in the endurance of the same sufferings which we also suffer.

And out of hope for you is sure. Or whether we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement and salvation, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also of the encouragement. For we do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, as to our tribulation which happened to us in Asia, that we were excessively pressed beyond our power, so as to despair even of living.

But we ourselves have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have our trust in ourselves, but in God, who raises the dead, who has delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver, in whom

we confide that He will also yet deliver, ye also laboring together by supplication for us, that the gift towards us through means of many persons may be the subject of the thanksgiving of many for us. For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and sincerity before God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in God's grace, we have had our conversation in the world and more abundantly towards you. May we look to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we do thank Thee for this privilege of gathering together in Thy presence under the blood of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. O, we do praise and thank Thee that we are privileged to read Thy word. We ask Thee, O Lord, that Thou wilt speak to us again through Thy word, that it may become life and spirit to us.

We ask Thee to take away any veil that may be upon our hearts, and give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may come into the true knowledge of God. We just commit our times to Thee and trust Thee for Thy spirit's working. In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.

The second letter to the Corinthians is a very unique letter. And, as a matter of fact, every letter in the Scripture is unique. But this second letter to the Corinthians is unique.

Why? Because it does not deal with doctrines as such. It does not deal with problems as such. It does not deal with practice, the practice of daily life.

It is actually a fellowship of the Apostle Paul with the church which he dearly loves. It is the pouring out of his heart without restraint. There is no letter written by Paul.

Then we can see the man Paul. Then this second letter to the Corinthians. It is not in the sense of Paul in action.

But it is in the sense of Paul, the man in Christ. If we know anything about the Apostle Paul, I think 2 Corinthians is the letter that we should really study. We can almost say that 2 Corinthians is Paul's autobiography.

We see a man in Christ. Not Saul, the great Pharisee. But Paul, the man in Christ.

Now if we want to use one word to sum up 1 Corinthians. What would be the word that you would use? I think it is evident. The word that can sum up the situation in the church in Corinth at that time when Paul wrote the first letter is the word, canality.

How they are carnal. Canality is the root of all their problems. And of course the solution to canality is the cross.

That's the reason why Paul said in 1 Corinthians that he knows nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Cross is the only solution to canality. But in 2 Corinthians, if we want to use one word to sum up 2 Corinthians, I think it is clear that that word will be spirituality.

First Corinthians is canality. That is the condition of the church in Corinth. Second Corinthians is spirituality.

That is the character of Paul, the apostle. If we want to understand what spirituality really is, what is true spirituality, not in the sense of pseudo-spiritual, but true spirituality, you have to go into the second letter to the Corinthians. That whole letter speaks of spirituality.

That man in Christ who is characterized by spirituality. It tells us of what spiritual life is, what spiritual ministry is, what spiritual sacrifice giving is, and what a spiritual man is. Now, this morning we would like to begin with what is spiritual life.

And maybe it will surprise you to see that the first element or factor of spiritual life is the sentence of death. There you will find in 2 Corinthians 1, Paul says in verse 9, But we ourselves have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have our trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Paul is trying to share with us what spiritual life is.

Actually he is not trying to tell us what death is, he is trying to tell us what life is. But in order to enter into life, there is one thing that must be present. It is a prerequisite to true spiritual life, and that is the sentence of death.

Without the sentence of death, without knowing what death is, without experiencing death, without having the sentence of death announced over you, without your answer, you cannot know that it is death. You will never be able to know what life really is. Because true spiritual life is resurrection life.

It is life out of death. In other words, sentence, the sentence of death, it is a judicial word, it means a judicial decision is made. And the decision is death, the end of everything.

And in some version you may find this word sentence is translated answer, the answer of death. In other words, when that judicial decision is made, the sentence of death is proclaimed over you, then you respond with an answer. When you are faced with this matter of death and life, your answer is, it is death, that's the end.

There is no hope, it is finished. But dear brothers and sisters, the sentence of death is the door to spiritual life. We do not really know what Paul refers to.

He said that when he was in Asia, he was in such great affliction, tribulation, the tribulation was so severe that he was despair of living. Now just think, Paul was not a weakling who will cry out with a little pain, a little suffering. He was a man with almost iron constitution.

And yet he said to the saints in Corinth that when they were in Asia, they were under such pressure that it was beyond their power to bear. And he came to the conclusion that it was death. There was no hope.

He gave up even the hope of living. Now we do not know really what had happened. Some people said he might refer to the turmoil in Ephesus, because you remember in Acts chapter 19, there was a great turmoil in Ephesus.

They wanted to kill Paul. And yet, we can hardly say that Paul referred to that, because if you read Acts chapter 19, even though the turmoil was great, and yet Paul was not really in such danger. You know his friends advised him not to enter into the Colosseum.

So he was not really in such danger. Now some people say Paul referred to some grave serious illness that he suffered during that period. Now we have no record of it.

We do not know whether it was so. It probably was. He was afflicted with such sickness, he was despair of living.

He was literally dying. He literally experienced death. The sentence of death was pronounced over him, and he responded and said that was it.

Probably it was sickness. We do not know. And you'll find that he used the word we, whether it was something that happened not only to Paul, but when he wrote 2 Corinthians, you know, he wrote with Timothy.

So probably at least Paul and Timothy and maybe others went through the same great tribulation, and they despair of life. We do not know whether he referred to a corporate experience, or he just referred to Paul himself, because often times you know he used the word we, but actually it is Paul. We do not know.

But one thing we do know, and that was he was in such a situation that the sentence of death was pronounced over him, and he accepted it and answered with the word. But dear brothers and sisters, when the sentence of death was pronounced and accepted, humanly speaking that will be the end of everything, if there is no life of Christ in him. That will be the end.

But because the life of Christ was in Paul, therefore you find that the sentence of death is the end of himself, but it is the beginning of God in him. It is through the sentence of death that he learned a precious lesson. The lesson of not trusting in himself, but trusting in the God who raises the dead.

The sentence of death is not altogether negative, because it teaches him on the one hand not to trust in himself, and how much do we trust in ourselves? It is almost unbelievable. But on the other hand, it teaches him to trust in God who raises the dead. And the result is, he had a testimony to give.

And the testimony was, it is the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in God's grace, we have had our conversation in the world and more abundantly towards you. In other words, out of this experience, a testimony comes forth. And the testimony is, that from now on, he lives, not by his own will, but by the will of human wisdom, but in God's grace.

From now on, he lives in the simplicity and sincerity of God. That is, what God would have, and what God will produce. Or in another words, from now on he lives by God.

By God's life, by Christ, and no longer by himself. Now brothers and sisters, of course, Paul referred to a very specific situation, a particular condition. But the principle is a general principle.

In other words, the sentence of death is not only applicable to a particular condition that Paul was in during that time. But as a matter of fact, you find that the principle of the sentence of death is applicable to every area of our spiritual life. Unless we know the sentence of death, we do not know what spiritual life really is.

You know, there are three things in our natural life that oppose the grace of God. That God has to deal with in order to bring us into true spiritual life. And these three things are, number one, human energy.

Number two, fleshly wisdom. Number three, self-glory. You find in everyone there are these three things.

Human energy. We have an energy within us which is natural, and that energy is tremendous. Now sometimes you think you are very weak, yet you do not have much strength.

And yet when it comes down to practical issues, you find how strong you are. You find how much you depend upon your own strength. You find how you strive and struggle.

You will not give up. You have confidence in yourself. You think that you can do it.

Tremendous energy. Even at a time when we say we are weak, you are struggling. You haven't given up yet.

You haven't come to the end of your energy yet. You are still wrestling with God. And you are like Jacob.

The angel of God finds it very difficult to overcome you because you are so strong. That's what you are, what we are. Human energy.

And because there is such energy in our natural life, we do not know the power of God. There is fleshly wisdom in us. How we think we are clever.

We can plan and plot. We can scheme and maneuver. We try and we attempt.

And if we do not succeed with one plan, we have the next plan ready for it. We are really clever. Now even when you are saying, I am foolish.

Well, in saying that, you are still scheming. Fleshly wisdom is almost unthinkable. And because it is there, we do not know the wisdom of God.

And then there is self-glory. Oh, how we seek distinction. How we seek position.

How we seek status. How we seek glory for ourselves. And even when we say, oh, let all glory be unto God.

Yes, secretly. Well, we have done it. Do we not deserve a little bit? So there you will find within us these three things.

We can do it. We will do it. We serve God.

This is the best plan. And because of that, we should have some glory. Now dear brothers and sisters, as we are under the bondage of these three things, are you living a spiritual life? Do you know what spiritual life really is? If we are living in the energy of our flesh, the natural energy, are you living in spiritual life? If you are living in fleshly wisdom, are you in spiritual life? If you are seeking for self-glory, is this spiritual life? How strange it is that when we first came to the Lord, we knew that we couldn't do anything.

We have tried. We knew that there was nothing we can boast of. And because of that, we came to the Lord and accepted Him as our Saviour and our Lord.

But after we are saved, we think now we have changed. Now we have energy. We can use our energy.

Now we have wisdom. We can use our cleverness. Now we can seek for something.

Isn't that strange? We forgot what we learned when we first came to Christ. We began to rely, fall back upon ourselves again. Even though we have the life of Christ in us, we have the spiritual life in us, but instead of using that life, we are still using our old life.

How do we know? Well, there is that human energy. There is that fleshly wisdom. And there is that self, vain glory.

That shows that we are not living in life, in spiritual life. We are still living in ourselves, in the old life, in the flesh. And because of this, because of God's love towards us, He has to bring some tribulations to us.

Now the tribulations can be of many forms, from many directions. It may be physical. It may be even mental.

It may be spiritual. The tribulation may come from people. It may come from certain things, certain events.

The tribulation may be something inward. Inward conflicts. Or it may be something external.

External circumstances. But anyway you find that, as we are following the Lord, as we are serving the Lord, as we are still relying upon our human energy, fleshly wisdom, and secretly seeking for self-glory, the Lord has to bring some tribulations to us. Whatever it may be.

And when these tribulations began to come upon us, we began to feel that a sentence of death is proclaimed over our life. Dear brothers and sisters, sometimes you feel as if you are surrounded, you are pressed beyond your measure. There doesn't seem to be any way out.

You give up the hope of living. You give up any hope. You feel now that's the end.

As if a sentence of death is announced over you. And your answer is, that's it. It is death.

Now when you come to that point, on the verge of giving up, you see struggling and striving. But strange, when you accept the sentence of death, you find that it is the end of you. But it is not the end of God.

It is true that because of the sentence of death, you cannot trust in yourself anymore. You cannot trust upon your energy, your wisdom. You cannot boast anymore.

And yet at the same time, it creates within you a trust in the God who raises the dead. When the sentence of death is upon you, you say, God, this is death. Then you look up and you find He is the resurrection.

And it is only out of such experience you taste, you touch spiritual life, which is the life of God, resurrection life. And only after you have touched that life, you can testify that you no longer live in human wisdom, but in the grace of God. From now on, you live in the simplicity and sincerity of God.

It is His life. You live by Him. Now, brothers and sisters, this is spiritual life.

Let's illustrate. You know, for instance, take Job as an illustration. Now, Job was an upright and perfect man.

He feared God, and he abstained from all evil. He was so perfect that God used him to challenge Satan. You know, Satan roamed over the whole earth.

He is an incessant traveler. Satan traveled to and through throughout the earth. He never stopped.

He roamed over the whole earth, and he is very observant. He is noticing everything. He is trying to find some hole, some gap that he can enter in.

And after he has completed that trip, God said, Now have you observed My servant Job? Now, no doubt he did. How perfect he was! And you know how Satan accused Job before God? And God allowed Satan to attack Job. With Satan it was evil, but with God, he turned the evil into good.

Now, when Job was afflicted, you know, Job really had the sentence of death over him. Now, suppose you just read a few verses from what Job said. I just pick out a few verses.

You don't need to look into it. In Job, you know, say, Job chapter 6 verse 8, Oh, that I might have my request, and that God will grant my desire, and that He will please God to crush me, that He will not lose His hand and cut me off. Then shall I yet have comfort, and the pain which spareth not, I will rejoice that I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

You know, he asked God to crush him. Let him die before he will deny the Holy One. He asked for death.

And in chapter 17 you'll find another place. He said, My days are past, my purposes are broken off, the cherished thoughts of my heart. If I wait, Sheol is my house.

I spread my bed in the darkness. I cry to the grave, Thou art my Father. To the worm, my mother and my sister.

And where is then my hope? Yea, my hope, who shall see it? It shall go down to the bars of Sheol. When our rest shall be all together in the dust. In other words, you'll find the sentence of death was upon him, and he accepted it.

The answer said, This is death. But dear brothers and sisters, out of his affliction, under the sentence of death, the glory of God appeared to him. Now, isn't that strange? We often think that we will see the glory of God when the sky is blue, when the sun is shining, but not so.

Often times you'll find the glory of God appears when you are afflicted. The glory of God appeared when the sentence of death is upon you. The glory of God appears when the sky is darkest.

The glory of God appeared to Job under the sentence of death. Job said, I have heard of you before, but now I have seen you. Now, when did Job see God? When he was under the sentence of death.

He said, I abhor myself. I repent in dust and ashes. But because of this, you know what was the result? He got a double portion, the blessing of the firstborn.

The sentence of death is the end of Job, the old man. But it is the beginning of Job, the man in Christ. Take Abraham as an illustration.

By faith Abraham obeyed God. He went out not knowing whither. He knew that God was leading him, but he didn't know where.

Even after he was in the land of promise, God said, I'll give you this land. Yet he sojourned in the land and he had no seed. He tried with human energy and wisdom and he got it Ishmael.

And God said, this was not it. When he came to 99 years old, you know, you have to combine Genesis 17 and Romans 4 together. When he came to 99, the Bible says, his body was already dead.

And his wife Sarah's womb was dead. There was completely no hope. He had given up every hope of ever having a child through Sarah.

And yet when he was 99, God said, Sarah shall give birth to a son. And he believed in God. Hope against hope.

By faith his hope was strengthened. He believed that God could do it. But what kind of God did he believe? He believed in the God of resurrection.

And he got. Dear brothers and sisters, before the sentence of death was pronounced over him, before he accepted the sentence of death, he could have Ishmael, but he couldn't have Isaac. God had to wait until he was dead.

Abraham was dead. Sarah was dead, so far as the womb was concerned. Then the God of resurrection began.

Of course, Jacob was a typical case. How Jacob was clever in himself. Oh, he was a planner, a plotter, a twister, a deceiver, a maneuverer.

And yet how God dealt with him, and dealt with him, and dealt with him. After 20 years, that Jacob was still strong. Wounded, but not dead.

Then you'll find came to the fall of Jebuchah. And the angel of the Lord wrestled with him the whole night, and couldn't overcome him. Couldn't prevail over him.

Oh, Jacob was so strong. That energy was so strong. That human flesh, that wisdom was so strong.

The self was so strong. Until finally God had to touch his thigh and cripple him. And brothers and sisters, when the sentence of death was upon him, Jacob literally hang around the angel and said, bless me.

Now you must bless me. I could bless myself before without your help, but now I'm helpless. You have to bless me.

If you don't bless me, I couldn't live anymore. And God changed his name from Jacob to Israel. Jacob came to know the God of resurrection.

From now on he lived by the strength of God. By the wisdom of God. By the glory of God.

Yes, it is true. He still sometimes, the old Jacob, tried to be revived. But whenever the old Jacob tried to revive, he feels the pain of it.

He couldn't run that fast anymore. He was reminded. So finally he could lean upon that staff and worship God.

Brothers and sisters, think of Peter. How self-confident he was. Oh, even during the last feast, when the Lord said, the shepherds shall be smitten and the sheep shall all scatter, Peter said, no, no, no, not me.

These disciples, they were, they were weaklings, but not me. I'm willing to die with you. And he denied the Lord three times.

You know, in Mark, we often say Mark's gospel is the gospel according to Peter. And there in Mark, you'll find Mark said, Peter went out weeping. When he went out weeping, he thought, that was my end.

That was it. That was the end. How could I deny the Lord three times? No more hope.

Peter was finished. But dear brothers and sisters, when the Lord was raised from the dead, He appeared to Peter alone. And not only to Peter alone, but He appeared to Peter and the other disciples.

He not only restored Peter before Him, He restored Peter in the eyes of His companions. How kind God was. The sentence of death.

But after the sentence of death, there is resurrection. And how beautiful is resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up with the eleven.

And what authority he had in preaching the gospel, in opening the door to the kingdom of God. Paul, not only had that experience in 2 Corinthians 1, but we can see that Paul had many experiences. For instance, in chapter 12, he mentioned how a thorn was upon his flesh.

And the thorn was the sentence of death. And yet, there he learned that God's grace is sufficient for him. So he boasted of his witness that the power of God may be manifested.

Or if you want to turn to some spirit experience as such, alright, Romans 7. And there you'll find in Romans 7 how strong Paul was. I could do it. The Lord said, do not be greedy.

And Paul said, I am not going to be greedy. But he said, the more he tried not to be greedy, the greedier he became. Oh, he found that his willpower, no matter how strong his will was, could not fight against the law of sin and of death.

Finally, the sentence of death came upon him. He said, in me, that is in my flesh, there is no good. Oh, wretched man that I am! Who can deliver me from this body of death? Now, brothers and sisters, for Paul to say that, for Paul to confess that, is not easy.

To confess that there is no good in him. To confess that he is a wretched man. But when the sentence of death is accepted, immediately say, thank God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Resurrection. Dear brothers and sisters, if we want to know life, that is life indeed. If we really want to experience spiritual life, remember, before the sentence of death, before death, there is no life.

Before death, the life is the old life. The life, the natural life. The life of the flesh.

And that life is no life at all. It is only after death. That which can pass through death and comes out on the other side, which is resurrection, that is life.

Brothers and sisters, how do we measure spiritual life? Do we measure spiritual life by how much knowledge we have? By how much activities we have? By how much achievement we have? By what position or status we have arrived? Oh, no. You do not measure life with disease. You measure life with death.

With the sentence of death. How much sentence of death we know. And it is only after the sentence of death we come to know the God of resurrection.

The Lord said, I am the resurrection. His life is resurrection life. And we do not experience His life until we know what the sentence of death is.

You remember our Lord Jesus said in John chapter 12, He said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it should die, it would bear much fruit. He that loves his soul life shall lose it.

But he that loses his soul life shall keep it to eternity. He that loves Me must follow Me where I am. There shall he be.

He that serves Me, My Father will honor him. Brothers and sisters, the life, that is life indeed, has to come out of death. When you go through death, that which cannot come out will be buried there.

That is what we were. But that which comes out is Christ. It is life.

It is spiritual life. So this morning my burden is just one. How do we measure spiritual life? How do we know this is life? This is not just ourselves.

This is not just our human energy. This is not just our fleshly wisdom. This is not just we, us.

How do we know? Measure it with the sentence of death. The more you know the sentence of death, the more you know the God of resurrection, you know resurrection life. Now, of course, this is not just an experience that we experience once and for all.

It is an experience that has to have a beginning, but there is no end in this life. In other words, we have to be brought to the place where we are under the sentence of death in order to know what resurrection life is. And then, from then on, we need to learn more and more of the sentence of death and of resurrection life.

Maybe in one area the Lord pronounces His sentence of death over you and there you learn His life in that area. But maybe in another area you are still depending, trusting in your flesh and God has to pronounce death over that. So far as God is concerned, the sentence of death is already pronounced.

Romans 6.6 Knowing, knowing not that our old man was crucified with Christ, the sentence of death was already pronounced over the old man. But so far as our experience goes, probably we have to enter into it step by step, day by day. So, thank God, the sentence of death to the world will be the end.

But to us, who are the Lords, that will be the glorious beginning. May the Lord help us. Shall we pray? Our Heavenly Father, we do praise and thank Thee that Thou hast planted Thy life in us.

And Thy life is the life that overcomes death. We do praise and thank Thee that unless we know the sentence of death, we will not depend upon Thy life. We will still be living by our old life.

So, Lord, we welcome the sentence of death. We ask Thee that instead of going under it, that we may rise up in resurrection life. And we come to know Thee as the God of resurrection.

We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

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