

Divine Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving Divine life, which is available to those who have faith and obey God, and explores the consequences of not partaking of this life.

Scripture: Psalm 138:6, Matthew 11:28, John 10:10, John 14:30, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 3:20, Revelation 2:7, Revelation 22:1-2, Revelation 22:14, Revelation 22:19

Topics: "Divine Life", "Faith and Obedience"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the tree of life as a symbol of Divine life, which is central to God's purpose for humanity. He explains that spiritual death results from disobedience and unbelief, separating man from God, the source of life. The sermon highlights that faith and obedience are essential for accessing this Divine life, which is embodied in Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega. Sparks illustrates that true life is practical, fruitful, and governed by the lordship of Christ, urging believers to commit wholly to Him to experience the fullness of Divine life. Ultimately, the message calls for a life that reflects the order, honesty, and influence of God's nature.

Transcript

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the garden of God" (Revelation 2:7).

"And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month... Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life... And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city" (Revelation 22:1,2,14,19).

THE PLACE OF THE TREE OF LIFE

So with this last chapter of the Bible we are taken right back to the beginning of the Bible and find ourselves in the presence of the tree of life. In this connection, the ending of everything is found to correspond to the beginning, but, of course, with one great difference: the end is the full realization of the meaning of the beginning. In this form of a symbolic tree of life we are quite evidently in the presence of the main issue of the ages - all the ages are compassed by this one issue. When Jesus, here at the end,

calls Himself the "Alpha and the Omega, ...the beginning and the end" (verse 13), He is referring to Himself as the tree of life. The tree of life is the first thing, and it is the last thing.

But although the tree of life was there in the midst of the garden at the beginning, man never partook of it. The partaking of that tree was on certain conditions. Those conditions were faith and obedience, and because man failed in those conditions, and because man disbelieved and disobeyed God, he was removed from the presence of the tree of life. Then God set up a protection for that tree and made it impossible for man without faith and obedience to partake of it.

Of course, these are spiritual principles set forth in a symbolic way. This question of Divine life is the supreme question in all history. It is the issue of all the ages - just whether man will receive this Divine life or not. Man's eternal destiny is decided upon that issue. This was God's supreme purpose in the creation. This life is the life of God, Divine life because of the Divine nature, and it was God's desire and purpose to share His life with His creation.

The symbolic place that this tree had is very significant. It was in the midst of the Paradise of God. This question of Divine life is at the very centre of the creation, and, having the central place in all things, it governs all things.

SPIRITUAL DEATH

This life was available to man. It was God's thought and desire that man should take this Divine life, but, as we have said, it was on the condition of faith and obedience, and man never partook of this Divine life because he failed in those two things. So God said, quite effectively: 'That kind of man shall never have My Divine life', and death, and the prince of death, reigned over that realm and that kind of man. What the Bible means by death reigns over the whole creation of unbelieving men. Disobedience is the positive aspect of unbelief. If man says that he believes, God says: 'Prove it by obedience!' Spiritual death is the hallmark of unbelief and disobedience.

And if you want to know what spiritual death is, the Bible makes it quite clear: it is separation from God. God is the source of this life, and separation from God means separation from the very source of life.

But that is not sufficient explanation. What is the effect of spiritual death? It is that nothing is ever allowed to come to perfection apart from God. It will just go so far, and no further. In our cemeteries in England we have stones set up over graves, and many of these gravestones are in the form of a pillar which is just a certain height, and then it is broken off. It is meant to say: This life just went so far and could go no further. Life apart from God can never go through to fullness.

There was a great atheist once who thought he knew a great deal. He boasted of his wonderful knowledge of philosophy, and made a great name for himself as what is called a 'free-thinker'. Then the day came when he was dying, and on his deathbed he was in a state of mental torment. His last words were: 'I am taking a terrible leap into the dark!' It does not matter how much we gain in this life. If it is apart from God that is all left behind. Nothing can come to perfection that is separated from God, and that is the mark of spiritual death.

THE BATTLEGROUND OF THE AGES

Now because faith and obedience are the way out of death, this matter of faith and obedience has been the battleground of all the ages. There is no greater ground of conflict than the ground of faith, and this

great issue was headed up to its climax in the incarnation of God's Son. The whole purpose of God being manifest in the flesh in His Son was to take up this issue and settle it for ever. "A Final Adam to the fight and to the rescue came."

This whole issue, then, becomes a matter of faith in the Son of God, and a life of obedience to Him. That is the pathway of eternal life. Now you see that the tree is not just a tree, it is a Person, and that Person is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We have been considering this New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, and we have been seeing how its many features are the features of Jesus Christ. Now what we have to see as we are coming near to the end is that all the features of the city are summed up in the tree and the river of life. All that the city represents is found in these final things, the tree and the river, and it is the tree of life and the river of the water of life.

THE PRACTICAL NATURE OF DIVINE LIFE

I want to say here, quite emphatically, that life is a very practical thing. That is true of natural life. We know what a tremendous thing it is to fight for someone's life. All the vast resources of medical supply and surgical care are concentrated into this one issue, and that vast realm of activity is concentrated upon this one thing - life. Everything and anything to save life. It may be just a little life in some poor body, but all the resources of medical science and care will be employed just to save that bit of life. What a tremendous amount is bound up with this matter of life! When that life has gone all the activity and energy and concern ceases.

This matter of life can make us very busy. I expect most of you have heard of the great missionary David Livingstone, and some years ago I was associated with a great movement for the celebration of the centenary of his birth. You know, for nearly a whole year we were busy, almost night and day, making the arrangements. We took the greatest hall in London, got the Archbishop of Canterbury to promise to preside, we had a special oratorio composed, and had special biographies of David Livingstone written. My word, we had to work hard! One day the man with whom I was working said to me: 'Old David Livingstone is not dead! He is still knocking us all out by his vitality!'

Well, you see, life is a very practical thing. Electricity is a very practical thing. You do not need that I should demonstrate that! If you want proof of that, just unscrew the lamp, pull down the switch and put your thumb on the point. If you did that to the lamp over there, the next moment you would be sitting in another corner and you would be believing in the practical aspect of electricity!

Now all that is only to come to our point. If all that is true of natural life, how much more true it must be of Divine life! Divine life is immensely practical. It is not just something which we receive; it is a power in us. The Apostle Paul said one of his very great things about this: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20) - 'Exceeding' ... 'Exceeding abundantly...' 'Exceeding abundantly above' ... 'Exceeding abundantly above all...' according to the power that worketh in us.' It is the power of this Divine life by the Holy Spirit.

THE LIMITING OF DIVINE LIFE

Now we have been seeing that this city, in every part, is an expression of the Divine nature, and that is brought down to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. Where there is anything contrary to the Divine nature, that is death and not life. Recall some of the features of this city.

We said that it was clear as crystal. You can see right through it - there is no dark thing. It says that it is like transparent gold. That is only a symbolism for absolute honesty, absolute truth, and absolute purity of mind, and where there is anything that is not absolutely honest and true and transparent, there is not life. If you were to try to deceive me, or someone else, or I tried to deceive you, that would seriously limit the Divine life in us. If we as Christians are not absolutely honest in our business, we are working against the life of God in us. If our Christianity is only a profession and not a reality, there is no life in it. I think I need not labour that any more. This place where God is is completely free from everything that is dark and dishonest. There are several things in the Bible which are said to be an abomination to God. We pointed out that the lie is an abomination to Him, and the Bible says that pride is an abomination, too. It says: "The proud he (the Lord) knoweth afar off" (Psalm 138:6). Pride cannot come near to God. What is pride? It is making believe something that is not true.

Let us look at another thing about this city. A city, ideally, is the symbol of order. In a true city everything is in proper order, and everything that is governed by it is put into order. God is a God of order. Disorder is contrary to His nature. Whether it be in the personal life, or whether it be in the home, or whether it be in the church, or wherever it may be, disorder is contrary to the nature of God. Disorder is lawlessness, and all lawlessness has come from Satan. Satan is called the 'Prince of this world' (John 14:30). Now, look at the world! There is only one word to explain the world situation, and that is CHAOS. More and more, and ever more chaos is coming over this world. The prince of this world is making for disorder everywhere in his world. In the realm of Divine life things are ordered if that life is having its way, for it is Divine life that will bring order into your personal life. When I see a disorderly life, a life in which you cannot see any real order, then I have to say: 'Divine life is suffering in that person'. When there is disorder in a company of the Lord's people we know quite well that the life is limited. We have to say: 'When I go there, amongst those people, I do not come away feeling renewed in my life.' When things are in Divine order, then you always feel life.

THE FRUITFULNESS OF DIVINE LIFE

Just two other things about this life. Divine life is always fruitful. You see, this tree is planted by the river of the water of life, and it bears all manner of fruit. It does not matter whether it is seventy, eighty or a hundred years old, it bears fruit every month. You have never seen a natural tree do that! It just means that fruit goes on and on and on. Divine life never grows old. What does that mean? You are saying: 'Well, what do you mean by fruit?' Life is influence. Somehow or other this water of life has an influence upon its surroundings, and that influence is seen in green leaves and much fruit - you have to say: 'Well, that water is having a great influence on this whole area!' If we really have this life in us, our lives will be influential. They will have an effect upon what is around us.

THE PLACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IN OUR LIVES

The last thing for this time. The city is the seat of government, and you notice that the river of the water of life flows from out of the throne, so it is the throne that produces everything. You know what that means! It is the throne of God and of the Lamb. In a word, it means the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. Right at the very centre of everything is the government of Jesus Christ, in virtue of His Cross, and as the Lamb. All the other things will depend entirely upon the place that Jesus Christ has, and will depend entirely upon how much we are committed to Him. If we are WHOLLY committed to the Lord and He is ALTOGETHER Lord, then the life will flow and all these things that we have said about life will be true in us. It will be the testimony to absolute committal to Jesus Christ.

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