

# Life Triumphant Over Death

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of life triumphant over death, as a present and continuous testimony, and explores the law of feeding upon Christ as the basis for this Testimony.*

**Scripture:** John 6:27-68

**Topics:** "Life in Christ", "Continuous Testimony"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes in his sermon 'Life Triumphant Over Death' that John 6 reveals the profound truth of life overcoming death through Christ, who is the Bread of Life. He highlights the importance of union with Christ, where believers must continuously feed on Him to maintain a testimony of life. The sermon underscores that this feeding involves prayer, the Word, fellowship, and worship, which are essential for spiritual sustenance and victory over death. Sparks encourages believers to recognize that life in Christ is not a one-time event but a daily practice that leads to a continuous testimony of triumph. Ultimately, he asserts that the Lord desires His followers to embody this truth of life triumphant over death in their lives.

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## Transcript

John 6.

You will notice that the two main parts of the chapter are the feeding of the multitude, and the discourse of the Lord upon Himself as the Bread of Life.

In seeking to recognize the great truths and their laws as brought before us in the Gospel by John, the truth which is at the heart of the sixth chapter, is the truth of life triumphant over death, as a present and continuous testimony. It is probable that you have not so read the chapter, and that that may be a new thought for some; but I think, if I give you an indication from the content of the chapter, you will more readily recognize that that is what the chapter deals with.

Firstly let me point out that the word "life" occurs no fewer than eleven times in this chapter; in verses 27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 68. Then the word "live" occurs four times; the word "living" three times; "not die" occurs once, in verse 50; and "resurrection" is mentioned four times, in verses 39, 40, 44, 54. On the other hand the word "dead" occurs twice, 49, 58. When you recognize all that, you have a substantial reason to believe that life and death take an important place in the chapter, and you are on your way to realize what is here as the underlying truth, the truth of life triumphant over death. Indeed, that is a New

Testament truth, and as a present and continuous Testimony, it is revealed throughout the New Testament to be what Lord desires.

#### Union with Christ in Life a Dominant Theme

When we commenced these meditations we saw that the two main themes of the whole Gospel by John are the Person of Christ, and union with Christ. This chapter is a very strong, very rich, very full unveiling of that twofold truth. The "I AM" of this chapter is very strong. Again and again we have "I AM" related to life. Then "Except ye" is connected with "I AM"; a relationship is found between the two. That carries with it this; that if this chapter represents Christ as relating to life, and the "Except ye" brings us into relationship with Him - union with Him in

that particular sense - then the Testimony to life triumphant over death is the issue, the outcome of this chapter. That can be carried forward right through the New Testament, and you will call to mind much, if you make a fresh enquiry with this thought in mind. You will be tremendously impressed with how much there is bearing upon the Lord's desire, that there should be in His Own a present and continuous Testimony to life triumphant over death. I think it unnecessary, even if it were possible in the space available, to carry you right through the whole of the New Testament teaching on the matter. Let us be reminded at this time that that is the Lord's will, that there should be in us, and in all of His Own, a present and continuous Testimony to life triumphant over death. It seems to me, that in a very large sense the Gospel by John is occupied with that theme; it is viewed in this Gospel from various standpoints, and seen to have various effects; but there is a main note, a thread, running through the whole Gospel bearing upon the matter of life, and that is set over against certain conditions which speak of death, which represent features of death, forms of death.

We have said more than once that the first "sign" of the second chapter, the turning of the water into wine at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, was a comprehensive sign embodying the rest of the Gospel, and the central note of that sign, that work, was and is, that of life triumphant over death. Contemplate that incident again and surely that is clear.

The next movement in chapter three brings in Nicodemus, and the serpent lifted up in the wilderness. The one, showing a state of death, under the curse resting upon the whole race; the other, the way out of death or over death, by new birth from above. New birth from above is surely, throughout the New Testament, the Testimony to life triumphant over death.

The next chapter, four, is again a presentation of death features and then the implanting of eternal life within.

Chapter five has the background of death under the Law; a living death, in bondage, weakness, impotence, and despair. The triumph comes, and newness of life, in Christ.

Now chapter six carries on the same theme from another standpoint, and with a fresh and added factor. Thus you go on through the Gospel right to the end, and you find step by step, and stage by stage, it is a touching upon, or dealing with, this very subject, life triumphant over death. You will come to Lazarus before long; you will come to the Good Shepherd Who giveth His life for the sheep; another form of the Testimony. That the sheep might live, the Shepherd dies; and the fact that the sheep do live, is a Testimony to victory over death in the Shepherd Who gives them life. And so you will see that this whole Gospel, from one standpoint, is one continuous unveiling, disclosing, and developing of this great truth of

life triumphant over death. We could easily pass on into Acts, where we should not have much difficulty in establishing our affirmation. The first few chapters of the book of the Acts are little else than a Testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the testifiers are the witnesses; that is, the Testimony is in the witnesses. Then the letter to the Romans. We are familiar enough with the Roman letter to know, that when you pass from the first chapters, you are passing from the realm of death from which you emerge into the realm of life triumphant over death; through chapter six into chapter eight. So we go on. It is good for us to know what a solid mass of Scripture there is back of anything which we have presented as the Lord's will. I mean this: it is a tremendous thing for you, or for me, to say that the Lord desires to have a present and continuous Testimony to life triumphant over death. That will be a challenge continually. What ground in Scripture have we got for that, to support us? What is there as a solid mass of rock under our feet to bear us up when we take such a position? Are we hanging a great declaration like that, with all that it involves, upon some unrelated, detached bit of the Word of God; or have we a sufficient foundation for such a position? That is why I have stayed to open out beyond the one chapter in relation to this. There is a tremendous amount of the Word of God to support that position, that the Lord desires in His Own there should be a present and continuous Testimony to life triumphant over death.

### The Law of Feeding Upon Christ

Now then, we come to break it up into some of its fragments. And that, of course, will mostly have to do with the law which governs this truth. There is the great truth, but it has a governing law; and in order to enjoy the Testimony, to have the experience of life triumphant over death now and continuously, we must recognize the law, and be adjusted, and obedient thereto. What is the law? Simply, it is feeding upon Christ. What feeding upon Christ means, we will not deal with for a moment, but recognize the fact as it relates to the truth.

You notice two things that come up in this chapter, one early, and one later. Verse 4: "Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes...." Do you get the link of that "therefore"? You might say in reading the first word: "After these things Jesus went away to the other side... a great multitude followed him, because they beheld the signs which he did... and he went up into a mountain and sat with his disciples... now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand."

What has that to do with it? Why is that "Jesus therefore" put in there? There was something in the back of His mind, just as there was in Cana of Galilee when He said: "Mine hour is not yet come." "Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" Do you notice the Passover comes up in relation to this; the Passover in the mind of the Lord is related to this, or rather, this is related to the Passover.

There is a background to this feeding of the multitude; it is related to some spiritual truth. Hold that for a moment, the fact that the Passover comes up at the beginning of this. Move on to verse 31: "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness... Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven." You have the Passover introduced, and now you have Moses, the wilderness, and the manna brought in, all in the same connection.

Then what is the link between those two things, and the main truth of life triumphant over death? Well, the Passover had a great deal to do with that. You are taken back into Egypt, back into the realm of death, back into the place where the Destroyer is abroad, where death is rampant, and the eating of the

Passover is life triumphant over death. It is found right at the commencement of their history; it fixed the date of their national constitution. They were constituted a nation by the Passover.

"This is the beginning of months." So that their history, as the people of God, was based upon that which represented life triumphant over death, the feeding upon Christ, the appropriation of Christ as their life. Now later the wilderness comes into view, and what you have in the wilderness is death. There are no signs of life in a wilderness; no element of life in a wilderness; there is no resource for life there. The wilderness was - apart from God - the place of death. When they ceased to be obedient to the Lord, they died in the wilderness.

Their cry was: Were there no graves in Egypt that thou hast brought us out to die in the wilderness? Oh, yes, it was the place of death! The manna was given, and it raised in them the Testimony of life triumphant over death as a continuous thing. That feeding upon the manna constituted the continuous Testimony in them to life triumphant over death.

### The Significance of a Changed Tense

Now here is a remarkable thing. Look at verse 53: "Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." Now the Greek tense there is that of something done: it is the second AORIST active subjunctive; that is, something which has been done, but which has to be carried on. An aorist tense is something done, but with something yet to be the outcome, the outworking. Literally it is completed in the past, but wholly indeterminate; that is, it has not reached its final issue although it is already done, something completed. It is something done in the past. When you come to the next verse, 54, you have a change of tense: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." The tense there is the present active participle: He that keeps on eating, makes a habit of it. So we have something done at the beginning, as a complete basis for something to come out and be carried on continually; a thing which relates to the origin of our history and of its continuation. I think that is a magnificent example of the Holy Spirit controlling grammar. It is a remarkable thing that at the beginning you have the Passover as the basic act, in which everything really is complete, and yet an implication that something else is to be done. Then the wilderness is introduced, and the very grammar here indicates that the wilderness experience is to be a habitual eating, something going on all the time. Life triumphant over death is something which we have completely when we first receive the Lord Jesus, but there has to be an outworking of it, and we have continually to receive Christ for the maintenance of the Testimony.

### Christ's Body - an Incorruptible Humanity

Do remember that this eating of the flesh and drinking of the Blood of the Son of Man, is the receiving of that which is incorruptible and has incorruptible life in it (comp. Acts 2:27). The flesh was the body of Christ, was that in which death was conquered: "A body hast thou prepared for me." Why? That, in a body - the sphere of death in the race - death should be conquered. I am so glad that the Lord met death just in death's own residence, the body. Death has struck right at the race in its very humanity.

Humanity was a thought of God of a very high order; a perfect humanity. Humanity is something unique. Humanity is something special. "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him?..." Of a higher order than angels is man. The inhabited earth to come is not to be under the dominion of angels, it is to be under the dominion of man. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

Angels are subject to man, when man is what God intended him to be. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" They are ministers in relation to salvation; ministers to man, in order to bring man to the place for which God eternally intended him. Humanity is a high thought of God, something higher than the angelic order. Ah! but it was there that the enemy struck, and it is in humanity that death reigns, and it is in our mortal bodies that death has its ground.

That is the teaching of the Word, "our dying bodies." In a body the Lord Jesus conquered death, and dealt with man's moral condition, which was the basis of death; He did it in a body. His body was the instrument of His triumph over the moral state of man, and death, the result of that moral state. Remember, in His body He met every temptation which is common to man and overcame it. In His body, in humanity: "...in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Temptation is not temptation if you do not feel it.

The question of how a perfect being can be tempted misses the point altogether. He was tempted, He was tried, and He was Victorious, and victory is nothing if you have no ordeal: victory has no meaning if you never have a battle. In His body He met from without, the assault of every kind of evil suggestion, evil influence; He was left alone with the very Devil himself in trial and temptation. In His body He triumphed, and in His body He bore our sins. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body upon the tree...."

We would be careful to say that we do not believe that there was any sin in Christ Himself in any part. Therefore we underline "from without." Now in that body triumphant there is incorruptible life. This Holy One did not see corruption because He had triumphed morally; it was not possible that He should be holden of death, because death had no place of residence in that body. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Life triumphant over death is in our appropriating all that which is represented by His body.

That is faith appropriation of Christ in His victory, in humanity. We will explain what that is presently. But we must remember that it was in His flesh, in His body that He triumphed over death; if you like - in a body He overcame. Christ's body was, and is, a body in which all Calvary's work and victory was accomplished. Receive the virtue of that, the spiritual efficacy of that by faith, and you are receiving Calvary's victory. Calvary's victory is not some doctrine you adopt, it is a spiritual exercise in relation to Christ Himself in victory: the taking of Christ, the making Christ yours by faith.

That is the way of Calvary's victory. Feeding on Christ is sharing His victory. Feeding on Christ is strength, is growth, is endurance; it is not doctrine or teaching, but feeding, taking, assimilating, appropriating, making ours. That is the way of victory over death continuously. A thing we do at the beginning once and for all. We take Christ; and then we do so habitually every day; just as those in the wilderness had to do afresh every morning. The Lord there carefully stipulated that they were not to live on yesterday's manna.

Nothing was to be left overnight; anything left over in the evening was to be burned. It was to be fresh every morning; not yesterday's exercise in relation to Christ, but today's, every day. The wilderness; well, Christ was in a wilderness with the Devil, and the first assault was concerning bread: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." What was the Lord's answer? The Lord's answer is out from the wilderness: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." You LIVE, even in the place of death, by the Word of the Lord. He is the Word in Person, and in commandment.

We will now move to the end of this meditation by saying a little about what feeding upon Christ is, as the way of the Testimony of life triumphant over death continuously. We shall be very elementary.

## What Feeding Upon Christ Means

Feeding upon Christ! Remember that you have made a start by making Christ your life, and that has to be kept up as a habit. That it will not do, according to the Lord's Word and stipulation, to have done it yesterday, and not to do it today, or to think that that is enough for a few days; it has got to be continuous, daily, habitual. What then is feeding upon Christ? It relates to several simple things, but the importance and magnitude of these things, which are regarded as commonplace, can only be recognized from the standpoint of the Testimony to which they lead. Is there a greater Testimony than life triumphant over death? There is none! And you and I, as we go on with the Lord, will discover that it is the highest thing in our experience, and the thing concerning which all hell rages. We are really up against the naked forces of the Devil, and they are against us, when once we have taken our place with the Lord Jesus, and the issue will be either the destruction of our Testimony by the forces of death in bringing us to death spiritually, and in any other way, or the Testimony will be maintained, the Testimony to Christ's tremendous victory over all the power of the Devil. When you view things from that standpoint, related things take on importance, and when one speaks about feeding upon Christ as being, in the first place a matter of prayer, then prayer is immediately related to the Testimony of life triumphant over death.

### Feeding by Prayer

We do feed upon Christ in prayer. To put that in another way, there is an imparting of Himself to His Own in prayer. We may go to prayer in weariness, and rise in freshness; we may go to prayer exhausted, and rise renewed. Is it that we have simply uttered some form of prayer, prayed some prayer? We know quite well if that is so we do not get up very much invigorated. Formal praying does not bring very much life. Going through a form of prayers sometimes only ministers death. But really seeking the Lord, reaching out, taking hold of the Lord, giving ourselves up to the Lord in prayer, never fails to have renewing, uplifting, strengthening results. You say prayer may wear you out? Yes, but there is a wonderful strength that comes by wearing out prayer. There is vitality given to the spiritual life even in prayer that tires us physically, and we go in the strength of it. Yes, prayer is a way in which Christ is ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a way in which we feed upon Christ; He becomes our life.

### Feeding by the Word

Then of course the Word: there is a value, a strengthening, enriching, building-up value in giving ourselves to the Word of the Lord, I mean spiritually. We can study the Bible in a technical way, and it may not mean a great deal of spiritual help. But to go to the Word of the Lord, in order that our spiritual life may be enriched; not with a congregation in view, not with increased information as our objective, but because of our own spiritual life; and to take pains with the Word of the Lord and to give ourselves, and not to be discouraged because for a little while we are getting nothing: there is a real value in that; and it is remarkable how, after the initial period of discouragement, you begin to get something. It seems as though the Lord tests us out, and then there is a ministration of Christ by the Spirit through the Word. Yes, but it is not only reading the Word of the Lord; there is a value in that; but that passage, quoted by the Lord in the wilderness to the Devil, has a deeper meaning than that. Go back to the book of Deuteronomy with it, and you will find that it was not Israel's reading or studying of the Law that was in view, it was their obedience to it. They lived by obedience to the Word of the Lord, and in every act of obedience to the Word of the Lord there is a fresh ministration of Christ. You can never be obedient to any part of the Word of the Lord without gaining Christ. It is always so. That is how we live by the Word, being obedient to it. Obedience to the Word is life, because it is an increase of Christ.

## Sustenance by Fellowship

Then we feed upon the Lord, and He becomes our life, when we recognize the Divine order of spiritual fellowship. That is a Divine order. You have it brought in with Acts: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers." There is a tremendous means of grace, a tremendous enrichment of Christ in the fellowship of the Lord's people. I believe the enemy will get believers, when they are together, to talk about anything under the sun rather than about the Lord. It is easy when you meet together with the Lord's people to be carried off with all kinds of matters of interest, and not to begin to talk about the Lord; but if you do there is always an enrichment, always a strengthening, always a building up; it is the Divine way. Fellowship is a means of imparting Christ to the believer. And wherever spiritual fellowship is possible, you and I ought to seek it, look after it, cherish it. There are all too many of the Lord's children today, who have no chance of spiritual fellowship, and who would give anything to have it. The Lord would have us at least two together. That is His order, and there is something in ministering Christ to one another. There will be something lost unless that is so. These are ways in which we feed upon the Lord.

## Enrichment by Worship

There is one other way. It is worship. There is a wonderful enrichment in worship. What is worship? Strangely enough worship in the Old Testament, by which the person or persons were themselves enriched, was by bringing something to the Lord, for Him. Yes, there is some enrichment, building up, enlargement, impartation of Christ, when we take account of what He is, and speak to Him of what He is to us. I do not think we have yet learned all the value of worship as a factor in our spiritual upbuilding.

When all is said about the way of feeding upon Christ, what is the all inclusive effect? What should it all lead to? What does it mean to appropriate the Lord Jesus? Well, you see He is everything that God ever wants us to have spiritually and morally, and there is all the difference between our struggling to be like Jesus and our taking Him to be His own likeness in us. I think that struggling to be like Him is a starvation way; we shall finish up as skeletons. Most people do, who try to be like the Lord by an effort; but when we begin to recognize this, that on the one hand I am insufficient, I never can be anything; on the other hand, He is all, and He is God's provision in that very respect to meet my deficiency, if that I by faith can take Him for that, then there is victory whatever it may be.

The way of victory is not struggling to overcome, it is taking Christ as the Victor. Is it a spiritual matter? A moral matter? Or a physical matter? He is what we need. I mean by physical, do we need physical strength? Well, nature will not give us what we need for spiritual purposes. The Lord has taught us strange lessons in this way. Sometimes we have thought that what we needed for spiritual purposes was physical renewal along ordinary natural lines of a holiday, and we have made that our objective, and, oh! what a poor holiday it has been; and the Lord has shut us up to something else and showed us that spiritual purposes required spiritual resources, and there are spiritual resources for physical needs for spiritual ends.

I do not mean the Lord deprives us of holidays. The Lord gives some people good holidays! The Lord lets us go out for a good day. That is not wrong, but I am saying there is a law which is deeper than that, and unless you recognize that law, the other will not work. The law is, that being tired, exhausted, thoroughly played out, yet if the Lord wants you to do something, He can make you able to do it without giving you a holiday. When you have settled that, and recognized that, and do not make the natural course the

essential, the indispensable, well, the Lord may give you the other, and doubtless He will.

That is the Testimony. Where is the Testimony of life triumphant over death in the physical if you go away and have a good holiday and thorough rest, and come back and work for the Lord on that basis alone? Where is the Testimony? There is something behind that, and the Lord would hold us down to that basic principle, and then: "...no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," and: "...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

When we are settled on that, the Lord is free to give the other; but if we think that this natural course is the only way to a spiritual Testimony, it is a contradiction. The Lord is life for us physically for all that He requires. The Lord is life for us morally for all that He requires. He has triumphed morally, and on every moral question that victory is for us. The Lord is life for us spiritually. We must take Him by prayer, by the Word, by obedience, by fellowship, by worship; take the Lord!

There is the truth, life triumphant over death, a present and continuous Testimony. There is the law; feeding upon, appropriating the Lord as our life. The Testimony requires the law. You cannot maintain the Testimony without observing the law. Fail on any one point of that spiritual law and the Testimony breaks down. You will never live in victory, if you do not pray, and pray every day. You will never live in victory, if you do not feed every day upon the Lord in His Word.

You will never live in victory, unless you come to use all spiritual fellowship for spiritual ends, if it is available. If it is not available, the Lord will have to be extra to you, and He can be in other ways. But we must recognize what He is made unto us of God, and take Him as that.

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