

2 Timothy 1:8-10 (James Butler Stoney) 66698

Bible Treasury: Volume 7, Life and Incorruptibility (1:8-10)

(2 Tim. 1:8-10; Luke 4:17, 30.)

Surprising as the statement may seem, there is hardly anything which souls have so imperfect an idea of, as the grace and purpose of God in its full scope and range—those good tidings which He announces to the prodigal. They see not to what this purpose reaches, or what that is which is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ. This it is that this passage (2 Tim. 1:10) discloses to us. We there find what is brought to light by the gospel according to the purpose and grace of God before the world began, now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death. What then has the gospel brought to light? Two things, which had heretofore been hid, even life and incorruptibility. Mark, incorruptibility—not immortality (it is the same word as in 1 Cor. 15:53). There was no doubt about immortality, that had been known before. But it is incorruptibility which, with life, is now brought to light through the gospel; and if we do not see this, we do not see the depth of what was in God's heart—what that is which He now offers to the sinner.

See how this purpose and grace of God filled the apostle's soul! When he wrote this Second Epistle to Timothy, he was in the hands of Nero; but he was not one bit troubled. Why? Because he had such a full sense of what the grace of God was. If I know what the purpose of God is for me, I get such confidence in Him that I am careful for nothing: I am not ashamed. I have got something secure on which I can lean in the hour of trial. Thus it was with Paul, though, humanly speaking, overwhelmed with trouble, being at the mercy of the Roman power; but what was that to him? He felt it to be an insignificant power in comparison to what he knew of God. He was not ashamed. He did not think of the things Nero was able to do to him; he was occupied with that which was in God's mind before the world began—the purpose and grace of God from all eternity, before the world or sin had any existence.

But to return. What came to light through the gospel? Life and incorruptibility. "He abolished death:" no stronger word could be used. It means that death has been brought to nothing—entirely ended—set aside. When what is omnipotent comes in, it is very clear that all that interferes with it must be displaced; it displaces that which had previously occupied the space. Thus Christ has displaced, abolished, death. The greatness of the thing that has come in causes the complete displacement of that which previously bore rule—death. Life and incorruptibility have come in. It was the purpose and grace of God—and it is not possible for language adequately to convey the wonderful purpose deep down in the heart of the living God, before the world was called into existence—now manifested by the appearing of His Son Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light.

Who is there that can gaze on such a picture as this, see that death is gone, and life and incorruptibility brought in, but must fall down and worship and adore the God who has done this? The one who refuses to do so refuses what alone could deliver him from the terrible judgment which rests on man—even death. What the apostle is insisting on here is the scope of God's grace, and where that grace puts us—even in life and incorruptibility. There is life where there was death, and incorruptibility where there was corruption, so that the ground is entirely cleared of judgment. Death is swallowed up in victory. We so constantly fail to combine these two things. O may our souls embrace the scope of God's grace!

If souls had the sense the apostle had of the grace and purpose of God, they would feel very little interest in the world and things here. Look at the way in which he connects the purpose in the mind of God before the world began with the accomplishment of it in himself. "God [he says] has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God, who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and incorruptibility to light through the gospel."

Now let us turn to the passage in Luke 4. In this gospel the Lord is offering Himself distinctly to Israel as the One anointed by the Spirit to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. But Israel rejected Him. It is not that He sets aside the Jew: the Jew rejects Him. And what then? He turns to the Gentiles, and here it is that He brings out the full scope of the blessing He had to confer. "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:25-27.) Here we find in figure the two things brought to light by the gospel—life and incorruptibility. Elijah brought life to the dead child of the widow of Sarepta; and Elisha restored the leprous body of Naaman the Syrian. After he had dipped seven times in Jordan, his flesh came again to him, as the flesh of a little child.

In these examples the Lord sets forth the scope and character of that which He Himself was there to give. He would not only overcome death, but He would do away with all the infirmity of man. He was there, like Elijah, to give life to the widow's child—to overcome death in the power of life; and, like Elisha, to heal the leper, to put an end to all infirmity and corruption—in a word, to bring in life and incorruptibility. Thus these two instances furnish us with a most descriptive type of the purpose and grace of God; and the moment the blessed Lord takes a survey of His work, He takes these two cases from the Old Testament and says, "There is the nature of the blessing I bring in—life and incorruptibility. I do away with all mark of sin. Here is a poor widow, I have none of this world's goods to bring her; but I go and visit her, and bring life to the joy of her heart. Here is a poor leper, and through death (as the Jordan typifies) I give him a new body."

Death and corruption were the marks of sin and of the judgment of God upon it. Do we realize the nature of the judgment that rested upon man? We cannot estimate it too deeply. Can any one sufficiently enter into the gravity of the fact that God's creation—that which was made in His own image—must be subjected to death and judgment? There could be no remedy for it. The law could do nothing of the sort; it could only show the utter inability of man to meet the requirement of God. The law made much of man. If you want to make a man commendable to men, tell him to keep the law: it gives him credit just in proportion as he keeps it. It was the very thing, could it have been kept, that would have raised man to the highest point as a mere creature; but it could not because of weakness, and hence judgment remained upon man. The very being made in God's image is a being under the judgment of God, because a sinner. How then is the judgment to be met? God's own Son comes into the world made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons. He magnifies the law, and makes it honorable. He does all righteousness here on earth. But is that all? No; He has come to abolish death; and abolished it He has, by having borne the whole judgment which rests upon man. Not only has righteousness been met, but the righteous One has carried out all the mind of God perfectly. He has abolished death in bearing the judgment, and has brought in life and incorruptibility. The judgment was terrible; but He faced it, and abolished it. He says, "For this cause came I into the world." He returns, having overcome all that was against us.

And what is the consequence? What place does it put us into? "In Adam all die, in Christ shall all be made alive." "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." How did Adam discover he was a dying man? Who told him that he was naked? Judgment had come in on account of the breach of God's injunction. The sentence had passed— "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." And though it was not at once fulfilled, Adam knew in himself that he was henceforth doomed; and that as doomed, he was naked before God, as the apostle says (2 Cor. 5), "If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked." But now God's Son comes to bear the judgment, and having borne it, He has abolished it. "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Dreadful is the fact that the creature made in God's likeness, and set upon the earth to maintain that likeness in this scene, is subjected to a criminal death; but God's Son undergoes it, and brings in life. He has risen out of this judgment and abolished death. "If a corn of wheat die, it bringeth forth much fruit." All henceforth grows out of Him, the solitary stem. He has displaced the thing that was under judgment and is Himself the Head of a new race. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." Death has now no sting to a believer.

But this is not all. It is not only that death has lost its sting to me, but I am looking for a glorious body. I have by the Spirit the assurance in me of a raised body. I know that this very mortal frame is entitled to incorruptibility, that this mortal thing is to be swallowed up of life! Life itself cannot have a resurrection; it is the body that has a resurrection. This body itself is to drink in the eternity of life!

We lose immensely in disconnecting these two things brought to light by the gospel. People think that the highest point of the gospel is that we have got life—that we shall never die; but that falls very short of it. God has set aside one man in judgment, but He has reared up another man in and through His own Son; and now there is more than life; there is INCORRUPTIBILITY!

The light of the gospel foreshows us ourselves no longer in this poor body, but in an incorruptible body, the folding-doors which now separate us from that wondrous state are drawn aside; and we like Him, because seeing Him as He is. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Mark that word mortal! the very body that is dying here is that which the Spirit (by which I know I have life) shall quicken. I am authorized to reckon that this mortal body of mine is under charge of the Holy Ghost to quicken it—yes, this very mortal frame. I cannot say I have got life only; I have got incorruptibility also. I belong to the One who set aside death, and in Him I have got life and incorruptibility. Alas! how little we have got a right sense of what we are brought into by Christ.

Look at the history of the prodigal. He was born again. He was invested with heavenly robes; he was new in mind, and also in appearance. He was transformed entirely from the far country—from all that belonged to it—to the Father's house; he was a new man—new in mind, new in appearance, and in a new place. This is what God who is rich in mercy does for a poor prodigal.

See, too, the thief on the cross! There I find a poor wretched sinner told, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." He was a dead man here, but alive in the life of the Son of God there!

Look at Stephen going through the most terrible death; he does not mind it one bit. Death has lost its power over him; it has no sting; there is not a question between him and the Lord. He is so little occupied with himself, that his thoughts are about those around him—about his very murderers he kneels down and prays, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Review the history of man and see what man is. See all the misery, care, and anxiety he is passing through because of the infirmities of the flesh. Contrast the state of the first man with the condition and state of the new man in Christ, and your heart must be filled with wonder, and with adoring fervor. We will praise and bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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