

Russell Kelfer

From Death to Life

994-A

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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From Death to Life

Let's have a quiz! See if you can tell me the author of each of these quotes?

Morality is its own advocate; it is never necessary to apologize for it.

Or who said this?

Laziness may appear attractive, but work gives satisfaction.

Or this?

Elephants and grandchildren never forget.

Or how about this?

The only things we ever keep are what we give away.

Chances are you may agree with the philosophy of some or all of those statements, but you haven't the foggiest idea who said any of them. They were interesting sayings, and they may well be the most important thing that person ever said. But they hardly changed the world.

You can take any of the great men or women of history, and after studying their lives and reading or listening to their speeches, boil most of their concepts down to a few paragraphs, and most of their great sayings can be placed on one sheet of paper. And if you were asked to write down only the things they said which changed the course of history, then that could usually be done in a few sentences or on a blank sheet of paper.

Even the real greats, who lived in generations past, only made a few utterances of such authority and wisdom that you can say the future of mankind was affected by their words. Oh, they may have stirred thousands when they were spoken...but a generation later, only a few sentences remain to etch their place in the history books; only a few words characterize their stay on planet earth.

Not so with Jesus. Every word He spoke left an imprint on the sands of time and on the hearts of men. Today, 2,000 years since

From Death to Life

He walked this earth, literally hundreds of thousands of men and women every day retire to the quiet place, there to take every word He spoke and feed on it, breathe it into their lives and engrave it upon their hearts. Every word the Master spoke changed the course of history...every word; that is why it is sometimes difficult to place even more meaning on one phrase than the others, for they are *all* of such eternal importance.

In this lesson, however, we are going to look at a statement the Master made that not only changed the course of history; but for those who have ears to hear, it changed the course of eternity as well. It is tucked within the context of an answer He gave to a condemning group of His own people, a group of people, incidentally, who were determined to put Him to death.

When last we looked in on our Savior, we walked our way through a busy day with Him, and we were amazed at the restful, consistent spirit He demonstrated, even while the demands upon His life came in apparent waves at a pace that would have caused many of us to panic. But, Jesus, demonstrating the life of a man filled with God, was always at rest. The multitudes press upon Him. He teaches them. A synagogue superintendent interrupts Him. He rises and heads for the man's home to heal his daughter. Again the crowds surround Him and hold Him all but captive. Lovingly, He meets their needs. A woman, bound in the prisonhouse of disease for twelve years, reaches out and touches Him. She is healed. He stops and tenderly deals with her before moving on. The synagogue leader's friends interrupt Him again. "It's too late," they say, "the girl is already dead."

Jesus quietly comforts the father and moves to where the girl is. He speaks that amazing word..."ARISE!" And she does, very much alive. And it is there that we stopped, as last we looked in on our Saviour.

The Scripture reads, "Now as Jesus went...two blind men came." Once again, God's life flows continually through Jesus. While He is speaking, two blind men, who have been following the Master, hanging on His every Word, observing only by listening (for they cannot see Him) believe that this man Jesus can do what no one else has ever been able to do. He can make them see. Can you imagine how they must have felt? They were shut out from the world of light approaching at last the Light of the World. Do you know what happened? The Master, Light Himself,

From Death to Life

touched them. Their worlds came alive, and they came alive as well. The Pharisees, of course, were watching with skeptical eyes. Physically, they could see; but, oh, how little they saw! Filled with jealous anger, they accused Him of casting out demons in Satan's power. The onslaught continued. Next, it was John's disciples who came and questioned Him about who He was; and lovingly, but authoritatively, He answered them.

Let's follow the Master now, for just a moment, and refresh our memories. From there King Jesus goes to a Jewish feast, but His heart was where hurting people were. So He gravitates to the pool of Bethesda, and there He encounters a crippled man beside the pool, a man who has been afflicted for thirty-eight years. He has been waiting and waiting for someone to place him in the waters at the time when it would heal him, but no one would help. Jesus asks the man, "Do you wish to get well?" Now in love, He heals the man...but ah...do you realize what day it is? It is the Sabbath! Wow! Look at the Pharisees now. They are literally beside themselves. They could care less that this poor man was made whole! They have looked in their law books and found a violation. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. They rebuke the Master for breaking the law. Listen, as He replies, "My Father is working. Why shouldn't I?" (John 5:17)

The Scriptures record this response:

The Jews because of this kept seeking all the more to kill him, for not only was he "breaking the Sabbath" but was also calling God his own Father, "making Himself equal with God."
(John 5:18 TLOCIS)¹

Now if you and I were God, at this point, I believe we probably would have done something or said something to let these religious hypocrites know that there was nothing we couldn't do. I probably would have called down fire from heaven to silence their idle threats. Jesus took the opposite approach. He always does. Listen to His reply:

Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Verily, verily, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from himself, but only what he may see the Father doing; for whatever things He is doing, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all the things he himself is doing."
(John 5:19-20 TLOCIS)¹

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony;
by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

From Death to Life

The title for this lesson is: From Death to Life.

The outline takes this form:

I- The One Who Can Do Nothing

II- The Only Way to the Father

III- From Death to Life

I- THE ONE WHO CAN DO NOTHING

Jesus opens this somewhat startling dialogue with His enemies by making a statement that has been swept under the rug by this world's theologians for centuries. The reason is simple. It removes from the flesh its last bastion of strength. It takes, even from the Christian, the last ounce of hope he has that he, in and of himself, can do something for God, or do something apart from God! Jesus, as man, could not do anything apart from God! All He could do was let God be Himself.

Now this statement was important, but not just because of its impact upon those who listened. It was important because it etched a pattern in the fabric of eternity for all of God's children for all of the generations yet to come. It was a divine portrait of the perfect father-son relationship, and a portrait of the kind of walk the Christian would have when he was in fellowship with the Father.

What Jesus was saying to us was this: Apart from God, you can do absolutely nothing. If I couldn't, then you can't. But that shouldn't leave you powerless, but rather powerful. Instead, just allow the Spirit in you to do what the Father, *through His Word*, has revealed to be His will.

As Jesus did only what the Father did, so we are to do only what the Son did, and as Jesus had the Spirit in Him to guide Him, so we have the Spirit in us to guide us into all truth. Now how did Jesus know that the Father would never lead Him astray? Because,

The Father loves the Son, and shows him all things...

(John 5:20 TLOCIS)

Imagine a small child walking along beside his dad. He has total trust, complete confidence, and unswerving faith in everything his father does. His father reaches up and touches a tree. The lad tries to do the same. The father skips. The boy skips. The father sings. The boy sings. The father jogs. The lad tries to

keep up and do the same. Why? The lad wants to do everything his father does, because he knows his father loves him and would only do that which is best. Never at any time does it enter the boy's mind that the father would do something illegal, immoral, or harmful. So, bathed in his father's love, he does everything he can that his father does. In the case of Jesus, He could do everything the Father did because the Father, through the Spirit, enabled Him to do so.

So Jesus wasn't speaking to these accusing Jews of His weakness, but rather of His strength. What He was saying was, where man's relationship with God is concerned, true strength comes from known *dependence*, not from independence. Man has been wrestling with that truth for generations. It is another blow to the flesh—the fact that man was created with a will of his own to choose *whom he would submit to*, not whether or not he would submit. Thus, Jesus spoke to the Scribes and Pharisees and said,

Ye are of your father, the devil, and his works will ye do.

(John 8:44)

Now I realize that this is a bit unusual; but if you are not a Christian or are not sure you are a Christian, the rest of this lesson is primarily for you. I would begin by lovingly reminding you, that contrary to what you may have heard, you are not your own boss. You never will be, nor are you doing your own works. You have been sold a lie. You are simply dependent on the wrong person. You are doing the works of the devil. They may even be what the world calls “good works”; but they are not “God's works”, so they will not last. Now those are strong words, but they are not mine. Before you reject them, search the Scriptures, like the Bereans. You may be surprised at what you find.

Jesus was saying, “The Father and I are inseparable. I am His Son. Whatever He does, I do; for He loves me and keeps nothing from me.” This was more than His accusers could stand. Not simply because He was breaking the Sabbath and justifying it, but because He was making Himself equal with God, by saying that He was the Son of God. This they couldn't handle.

II- THE ONLY WAY TO THE FATHER

Jesus went on:

And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises up the dead and makes

From Death to Life

them alive, so the Son also makes alive whom He will. For not even is the Father judging anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son, so that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who is not honoring the Son is not honoring the Father who sent him.

(John 5:20-23 TLOCIS)

Now if you can read that verse and find a way for non-Christians to be accepted by God, you either have a vivid imagination, or a different Bible. There is only one way to come to the Father. It is by coming to Jesus Christ. Jesus reiterated it in John, chapter fourteen. Remember? He said clearly:

I am the way, (I am) the truth, and (I am) the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

Jesus was not being proud. He was meek and lowly of heart. He was being clearly honest, lest someone miss the way. So He clearly defined the way...the way to the Father. He said quietly, "I AM is the only way to God. I AM is the only truth about God. I AM is, therefore, the only vehicle from death to life." You can either reject that truth based on experience or emotions, or accept that truth based on the fact that it is the clear, unchanging Word of God. You can either accept that truth based on who God is or try to change God into your image by redefining reality based on your concept of what you think He should be. One way you remain in darkness, but get your way. The other way, you come out of darkness into light, because you accept His way. The choice is always the same.

Granted, this is one of the most difficult truths in all of Scripture. Theologians have attacked it for centuries as narrow and unloving on the part of God, and yet it is exactly the opposite.

Think about it. If the Father allowed any other way to heaven other than through Jesus Christ, He could not be a righteous God; Jesus would have died in vain, and God would be a liar.

Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is the Savior of the world...and every man and woman needs a Savior. The Bible leaves no doubt about that. Have you not heard these verses?

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:23)

There is none righteous, no not one: (Romans 3:10)

If you would like to make yourself the singular exception in history to that clear pronouncement of the sentence of death,

From Death to Life

feel free to do so. But if you do, you are saying that you are more righteous than Enoch; more righteous than Noah; more righteous than Abel; more righteous than Moses; more righteous than Abraham. You are saying that, never at any time, have you thought or done anything less than that which is God's best. Say that and you become a liar, and that will become your "first" sin.

All of us have sinned. We are all "dead" in trespasses and sins, according to Ephesians 2:1, until or unless Christ comes into our lives and gives us life. It is not subject to our theological interpretation; it is a Scriptural absolute.

And all men, if they are to come to the Father, must do so by honoring the Son; no matter how good their lives; no matter how religious their background; no matter how noble their works. All judgment has been given to the Son, and no man comes to the Father, but by Him.

If you are here or you are listening, and you have trusted in your own righteousness or your own religion for years and said to yourself, "God will accept me because He is a God of love," you have been deceived. A holy God *cannot* accept you in your sins, no matter how religious you are. So *as a God of perfect love*, He paid the price for you to make you holy, and He offers it to you as a free gift...no strings attached. So God does not accept you based on what you have done. He accepts you based on how you respond to what He has done.

III- FROM DEATH TO LIFE

If you think you don't need to accept that gift, you are a fool. A moral fool, perhaps; but a fool, nonetheless. A religious fool, perhaps, but a fool, nonetheless. A respected fool, perhaps; but a fool, nonetheless. Don't refuse it on the basis that you are not enough of a sinner. You are refusing to accept the righteousness of God...and that is the greatest sin of all.

But, you respond, "Why must I be saved? I already love God!" Unfortunately, you do not understand real love. Let the Bible explain it:

Herein is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us,
and sent his Son, to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:10)

Did you hear what Jesus told those angry, accusing Jews? It was so clear. He said:

From Death to Life

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is (has already) passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

Now please listen carefully. In this one passage, Jesus gave us both the prerequisite and the process for eternal life.

The prerequisite is this: Jesus Christ is the only way to God. You must come to God through Him. Therefore, if you want to come to God, you must come to God through the Son, on the Son's terms.

Then, He gave us the *process* of salvation.

1- You must first hear My Word. The Word of God must reach your heart. It may come to you in a thousand ways. Romans 1 says that even the heavens declare it, so that all men are without excuse. In this age, however, not only do the heavens declare it, the churches declare it, the radio declares it, the television declares it, the bookstores declare it. You are indeed, without excuse. If you pretend to have never heard it, you have heard it today. You are without excuse. Step one. The Word of God reaches your heart.

2- You honor the Father by trusting the Son. To trust means to rest the weight of your life on; to place your confidence in with abandonment; to surrender your will to God's. You reject all other avenues as without hope, and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Once and for all, you confess your sins and invite Him to become your way to the Father. You ask Him to come into your life.

3- At that moment, Jesus comes into your heart. Instantly, you are born anew. Powerfully, you are translated from the realm of death to the realm of life. Eternally, you are given an inheritance among the saints, guaranteed a mansion in glory, a resurrection body, and a life without end in the presence of The Living God.

4- From that moment on, you have eternal life. Not *will* have. *Have*. Present tense; permanent possession. In that moment and from that moment on, the one thing you were born for is yours, and *it shall be yours forever*.

Nothing can take it from you. Not death. Not life. Not principalities. Not powers. Not angels. Not demons. Nothing that

From Death to Life

has happened in your past. Nothing that can happen in your future. Nothing...can separate you from the love of God which is yours forever the moment you trust in Christ (Romans 8:35-39). Like one of those doors with the spring-loaded bar across it, you can place your weight on it, and it opens; but praise God, on the other side, there is no such provision. Once through, you are forever sealed in Christ.

5- You bypass the judgment. You shall not come into condemnation. You will not stand before God and be judged for your salvation, because Christ took your sins and paid the price for those sins. They were judged at Calvary, and the moment you invited Him into your life, God cast them from His presence, as far as the east is from the west. "He who believes in Him who sent me...by honoring the Son, does not come into judgment." Period. End of statement.

6- You will instantly pass from death to life, when Jesus enters your heart. It will be a finished act. You are not just missing death (future tense). You were dead (past tense); you are alive (present tense); you never will be dead again, (eternal tense). Think about it.

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

From death to life, oh, precious thought;
That phrase with godly power's wrought,
It is a photograph of me
The instant Jesus set me free.

No fearful wondering, awesome dread,
My Jesus raised me from the dead!
He broke the chains my soul had known
And placed me up on heaven's throne.

His blessed Spirit was my seal,
The flames of hell I shall not feel.
For in that moment He came in...
And set me free of all my sin!

And now, with angels' joy I sing
From death to life; that's everything!
Oh, what victory; joy divine!
I am alive! and Christ is mine!

Present tense salvation: Christ living in you.

Future tense salvation: you living with Christ.

From Death to Life

All accomplished by a simple, personal, specific act of faith. You acknowledge the sin that has separated you from the Father. You ask Jesus Christ to come into your life, accepting His death as God's free blessed gift, and you walk *immediately into the sunlight of salvation*.

Not only future salvation. Present deliverance.

That is the wonderful invitation that Jesus Christ is offering to you this moment. He is asking you to pass out of darkness, into light; out of death, into life.

Seldom do we speak so intensely of such basic matters. But there is no need for you to go through the motions of growing as a Christian, until you have been born again. Unless you pass from death to life,

You have no inheritance.
You have no hope.
You have no peace.
You have no life.

It does not matter how many churches you have joined, how many works you have done, how much religion you have learned. You cannot meet God unless you come to Him by way of His Son. Come to Him today.

With outstretched arms, He beckons you.

With nail-scarred hands, He reaches out to you.

With an ocean of forgiveness, He waits for you to set you free.

Why not invite Him right now, to raise you from the dead?

Why not ask Him right now, to lift you into the heavenlies for all eternity?

Why not surrender right now to the wonderful, matchless grace of Jesus and be born again?

There is no other way. There does not need to be.

There is no other truth. There does not need to be.

There is no other life. There does not need to be.

Jesus Christ is all you need.

You may never remember anyone else's famous words. But every word Christ ever spoke changed the course of history. And no words He ever spoke changed the course of eternity like those immortal words,

From Death to Life

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is (has already) passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

Those words changed the course of my life. They have changed the course of millions of others, as well. They are waiting to change yours. Your God is waiting patiently to give you life.

On the authority of the Word of God, this moment, I invite you to let Him.

For Application

1- Memorize John 5:19-24. Paraphrase it. (Put it in your own words.) Meditate on it this week, throughout the week. Ask yourself these questions:

- a) What does this passage say about the way to God?
- b) What does this passage say about our security in Christ?

2- Why do you believe God limited the way into His presence? Why was Calvary necessary for our salvation? Can you explain this clearly to an unbeliever? Write an imaginary letter to a friend explaining God's wonderful plan for redemption. Design your own tract or booklet, explaining the way to God.

3- Try to think of a practical way to explain to a child how they can be *instantly* translated from death to life. Include an illustration of the permanence of our salvation.

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