

"Religion a Life"

Text: John 4-14

A SERMON BY C. E. VERMILLIA—
THE LIFE EXPLAINED AND
ILLUSTRATED.

Text: John 4-14. "The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."

Jesus here represents the life of the soul which is inspired thru Him, as being like a well of water which is a spring is constantly bubbling forth and over its bounds. It is a well which has a spring for its supply, or it might be understood from what we know of an artesian well. Such a well is characterized by freshness, volume and moving energy; it is living water. Something like this says Christ will be the life which I shall arouse within the soul of those who will drink at my fountain, a life which is a life indeed, a life which, though small in its inception, still has within it the forces and power which if conserved will bear itself on thru this world with its varied experiences and stand forth at last made perfect and beautiful thru its efforts. Just as the small stream begun by the flowing well selects and winds its way toward the river or sea, sometimes bubbling with seeming delight and sometimes running deep and calm in apparent meditation, always makes progress and ever increases in volume, so the life of the human soul when started on its life evolving course will continue to grow and increase thru time and eternity. Jesus here makes much of the life within the man or better, which is the man, and indicates that in this life is our salvation and our hope. In this robust, divinely aroused and informed life, in this life feeling the tug of the perfect ideal, and conscious of an upward drawing, lies the most trustworthy and dependable thing known to man.

The Life Explained and Illustrated

This was no incidental remark which Jesus made to the woman, it was one of the fundamental truths of His Gospel. In fact it was the central idea of his message and he frequently, yea, constantly emphasized the same. "I am come says He that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." "He that hath the Son hath life." "He that hath the Son hath life." Then it was said of him: "He is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing, ye may have life in

his name." Paul also makes it the heart of his message. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." His emphasis of the fact that nothing was of avail but a New Creature in Christ, grows out of the same thought. When Jesus thus spoke to the woman he was aiming to reveal the true nature of the religious life as he desired all to understand it.

It seems like a waste of time to reiterate the fact that the religious life is primarily a soul life. We have all heard this time after time and have long since come to accept it as a part of our faith. There is such a thing however as holding a truth and seeing only part of its real significance. This it has seemed to me may be the case in our thought of the life within. In fact this has been my own personal experience. Only in recent years have I come to see what I desire to emphasize as a necessary conclusion of the teaching of Christ in regard to this Divinely inspired soul life. I wonder if we have not thought more about its withinness than of the real nature of the life itself, and its meaning. Let us now see if we can probe the idea a little further, and find something that will give us hope and encouragement in our efforts to realize the Christian ideal from day to day. "A well of water within Him springing up unto eternal life," what is the fuller meaning of the same?

We are all familiar with the idea that the inner life is the determiner of our conduct. Its ideals and its loves and aspirations determine the character of the individual. This is a truth that we must not lose sight of and it is one of the reasons why Jesus addressed himself to the culture of the inner man. This however is not the only significance the inner life should have for you and me. The fact that there is at the core of every one of us that which is alive and not dead, is a thing which few of us have ever thought of as being important, I judge. Jesus wanted life within that there might be life without, but more than all he wanted the life itself, and it seems to me that in his messages he is constantly trying to bring his hearers to see that the perpetuation of the life itself is the important thing and a thing of comfort to those possessing it. "He that hath the Son hath life." He that hath the Son hath a kind of life made possible only thru the Divine touch. The more I think of the human soul with all its so-called inherent powers and the outcome of the same the more I am inclined to think of it as being very similar to an egg. This may seem to be a crude illustration, but it will help you to see my point. Within the shell of an egg, are powers and forces beyond number. There are forces there which can so combine as to break the cold shell which enclose the same. These forces

can even so operate as to produce a live animal. When we think of it from this standpoint we say only God could equal it in its ability. But wait, that egg so rich in inherent power, so divine in its capabilities, can not even break the shell which surrounds the inner content without some warming influence be brought to bear upon the same. Warm it to a proper temperature, and soon it begins to trob with life, life so vigorous, and so well directed in its efforts that the live animal is made manifest. The application of the heat, took the dormant or sleeping life shut up within, and awoke it with such tremendousness that new results took place. I wonder if your soul and mine is not somewhat like that? We have some life, we are of the earth earthly in most of it. We have some divine aspirations, and outlooks, but it is life devoid of the warming influence of the Divine spirit, and without which the shell of earth which surrounds does not seem to be overcome. Touch the soul by the presence of God thru Jesus Christ, and the whole camp is awake in preparation for a new line of march. There is a force in action which if properly nourished, will ultimately shake off this incorruptible body and take on one which is incorruptible. The shell of life will be broken because the soul has started to live in a new direction, because the forces of the same are now all being co-ordinated so as to produce a result different from that aimed at before. There is life within. The very life itself which a man thus has insists in breaking its bounds. It is a well of water springing up. Thus we see that the Life within to which Jesus referred is the real self, Impregnated, and thus stirred unto a new type of action. He came that we might have life, that there might be a living somewhat. He aims at a strong and powerful, as well as an active soul life. This life is the inner, thinking, feeling, discriminating, loving, longing, purposing and willing somewhat which is ever driving the wheels of our being. He desires a healthy, robust, vigorous, soul life. Thru Him men are to have power of soul, strength of will, keenness of insight and a healthy spiritual condition, which will be able to move thru this world and make it to serve man rather than man to serve it. The plant life will further illustrate my point. When the seed has been properly affected from without it begins to grow. That is the unseen life principle, begins to act and thru its activity, every particle of substance in the grain, and certain portions from the soil as well as from the air are made to serve its purpose. Upward it pushes and forms a stock, always thrust forward not by the guiding influence of that without alone, but by strength of life within. The life of the plant is its salvation and the healthiness of it is a guarantee that it will hold itself to the ultimate end i. e. fruitage. So in your life and mine there is a spirit propeller, and the life and vitality of this is the all-important thing. Get this right, revive or arouse it from the heavens, and it will begin to affect all we do or think, and force us forward in accordance with the regulating influences adopted thereby. Let God touch this soul of ours so as to give us a full realization of our spiritual destiny and let the will thru this light and inspiration come to themselves, and the well of water begins to spring up.

This life thus begun and perpetuated thru the inspiration of the divine, is to have some power in itself, if we read the word of Jesus rightly. There is strength, power and ability suggested by the word of scripture. As the life in the plant is the guarantee of a proper outcome in the plant, so the spiritually quickened soul is a guarantee of a proper outcome in your life and mine. In this life, thru its discriminating powers, thru its newborn insight, by its loves, and its renewed will, we are to find that which will take us thru the daily relations and bring us out with more life than ever. In other words the aim of Jesus is not to produce a lot of spiritual punch and judies. He can take no delight in dressing and undressing human dolls. He wants life in you and me, big and strong. He knows that if this life can be secured and maintained that there will be no question about the way it will conduct itself before life's duties and privileges. He has said that he is the way, but not the way in the sense that he points out before hand every form of action and every conclusion to which you and I are to come. He gives no one a vest pocket law book to which he can turn before he acts in life. He tells us not how we shall solve all the difficulties we face, or what particular deeds will be the fitting. All this is to be cared for, but, we having life thru Him, we are not dead somewhat just reading off his rules, but living minds with his motives and divinely inspired sense selecting the things which will be in keeping with the inherent ambition. The plant again, takes just

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what oxygen it needs out of the air because it has a principle of life controlling its every act. So you and I are to be big with life power, and choose and do the thing which will help the life to become bigger, because of the power of the life to select the same. Our relations to our own children will throw a little light on this spot. We advise our children a great deal, but no father wants his child to grow up with the idea that he can settle nothing for himself. We show him how to saw the first board to a line, but we take more delight in seeing him with his father inspired mind, learn how to guide the saw, than when we do it. Nothing in fact pleases us more than to see the life within the boy move him to exercise his own mind, inspired by us and our ideal. You have sometimes seen your child planning to do his work well, with the thought that it will please the parent. Like Jesus he is doing the things that will please his father and the father rejoices that he is doing it and not the father. The father inspires but the child acts, and they are his own acts. The father is there in great power, but the child is there also the more, because he feels that the father's ideal is his and he is striving to attain the same. Jesus does not come into this world to do a man's work, or to supplant him in his soul action. He comes to quicken the life of the man so that he will be able to do his own work. It is a vigorous soul life headed in the right direction, and always forging forward in the light of the ultimate ideal to which it is to attain, that Christ aims at and, this secured, he knows that the life is safe.

This vigorous life which is at the center of our very being, because it is a growing and living somewhat, is that which saves us from shipwreck. This is true both for the Christian today and also for those who have gone before. When we think of the abundance of superstition and ignorance as well as error, which have prevailed in the minds of Christians of all ages, we can but wonder how they have come thru it all and not made shipwreck of the life. We are so hungry for the truth and so confident that what we believe must all be true that when we realize the facts of life as they are and have been, we stand amazed before them. Some lives indeed have been wrecked, but the bulk of the lives which have been of the sort that are

born from above, have come thru it all, now clinging to this idea, and now to that. Thru it all the steady, and divinely informed stream of life has made progress. The saints have escaped as the redeemed who washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Should I say, "Like the redeemed," who have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb?" No this is not correct. They are the redeemed themselves. As John says these are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God." It seems to me that these words were spoken of those who have been trying to let the life within, live, those who have struggled on, dodging, first this way and that, both to avoid danger and to secure a safe footing. These are they who were safe not because of perfect beliefs alone and the permanency of their positions, but because of the bubbling, struggling and onward pushing life within which insisted on finding a way of living. The vital thing was not the belief alone by which life lived, but the life that wanted something by which to live for the time being, at least. Only as we come to grasp this truth can we see how the human soul can live on with so much error coupled with its so-called truth. We believe something but usually it is only part of the truth, or a little more than the same. In this condition what is it that saves us, and enables us to make progress? We are saved by the life within, which knows its destiny sufficiently to hold itself in the right direction. The soul's aim and its insistence on realizing that aim, its life and growing pushing ability, is the thing wherein lies safety. Not all our beliefs will be absolutely pure and beyond correction as time passes by. Error no doubt has always been a part of your belief and mine, thru it all the soul life, unrecognized by us, has been of the kind that wormed itself forward in spite of some error, thus coming to a more perfect knowledge. Like the plant, again, which insists on growing even where the odds are against it, so the soul has gone on in its life. Living, in fact, is much like the conduct of one trying to escape the bullets of an enemy in the forest," first this tree and then that serves as a protection until at last a sufficient distance has been placed between the enemy and the fleeing man. The various trees were not very good protection but they were the best devisable. The trees were not the things being defended but the life which was bent on getting into safe cover. The trees and the enemy were all in the woods, but the life struggling for safety was mightier than the woods, and it was the thing which was making for safety. The winding course of a stream which worms its way around hills thru woods and across plains which seem to be constantly presenting insurmountable obstacles, nicely illustrates the action of the life which is born from above. As we behold the stream with its serpentine course, we almost wonder how it is that it has not gotten lost, and forgotten the great sea the beckoning of which it has seen. A stream never loses its way. It takes a long time and covers a considerable territory sometimes, but it never gives up, the energies of all its volume push it forward, and some time after a long and tedious struggle against the uncertainties of its course, it will lay its weary head on the great bosom of the deep and in a short time will be lulled into peaceful sleep. The drawing of the sea and the force of its own body has held it on its way. Sometimes the opposing banks have seemed insurmountable, but it has only waited and deepened, until at last it was able to make its obstacle the generator of strength sufficient to conquer. Again across its way, there has been hurled steep precipices as if to try its faith and confidence. Precipices never stop a stream. With one mighty leap it rushes into the seeming abyss, only to find that the leap of faith was the way to new life, and all its energies for the time spent in dancing and sparkling midst the spray of a new hope.

(To be continued)

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