

## 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10

### GOOD NEWS ABOUT DEATH

“Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

She was a gracious lady who had walked with the Lord for many years. She was widowed earlier in life and had remarried. Her husband, Garnet was a good man. He had served in the Canadian Forces during the Second World War, seeing perhaps more death than anyone should ever have to witness. He was a member of the lodge, having advanced to some of the highest ranks within that particular organisation; and though he faithfully attended the services of the church, there was a sense of unease concerning his relationship to the Master.

On one occasion while I visited in their home, that gracious lady confronted him, saying, “Garnet, if you were going to take a trip to Montreal, you would prepare for that journey. You would purchase your ticket; you would pack your luggage and arrange for a place to stay. You say you’re going to Heaven. However, I never see you preparing for that trip. You never read your Bible. You never pray. You never speak of that journey. Are you certain you are going to make that trip?”

“I’m okay,” he airily dismissed her concerns, “I have done what was necessary.” However, there was never any indication that he had a living relationship with Christ the Lord. I understand that I am not to pronounce judgement, but I never witnessed any evidence of fruit in that gentleman’s life. Only a matter of months after that conversation, I preached his funeral. Though he said he had done all that was necessary, there was scant evidence of transformation.

Death is the last thing we talk about in modern life. Those who sell life insurance can relate multiplied stories about how difficult it can be for people to think about what is inevitable. I have frequently observed with deep sorrow how widows or widowers are unprepared when death comes—their loved one never prepared for death. Whether death for a loved one comes suddenly and unexpectedly, or whether death follows a lingering illness, few people are actually prepared. Surely the poet penned a great truth when he wrote,

“And come he slow, or come he fast,  
It is but Death who comes at last.”<sup>2</sup>

Almost incidentally, the Apostle speaks a glorious truth concerning Jesus our Saviour. Paul testifies that Christ Jesus abolished death. Though we are believers in the Risen Son of God, at times we struggle with this truth, finding it difficult to believe. When our beloved family member is laid to rest for the final time, we hurt terribly and at that moment we are painfully aware that our loved one is no longer with us. The familiar voice, the warming smile, the gentle touch are but a memory at that time. How can we imagine that they are alive?

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Walter Scott, Canto II, Introduction, st. 30, Marmion, (1808)

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Nevertheless, we who are twice-born are now “alive in Christ” [e.g., see **ROMANS 6:11**]. The evidence is witnessed in multiple ways. We understand that the body is dying; but our spirit has been made new in Christ Jesus and our soul is redeemed from death. We know God who is life. We are brought into the presence of the True and Living God. By faith, we now walk with the Risen Son of God. And yet, we witness the daily dying of this frail flesh. We who are believers in the Living Saviour need to be reminded from time-to-time what Christ has accomplished and how we benefit from His rich provision. Paul’s words penned in our text afford opportunity to remind us, as Christians, of what we possess in Christ our Lord.

**CHRIST JESUS ABOLISHED DEATH** — “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” [**2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10**]. It is easy to be caught up in the exciting news that Christ has abolished death and yet miss an important fact—the subject of **VERSE TEN** is *grace*.

If we are focused on the present life, we can become discouraged and disheartened. Trials and testing, suffering and sorrow are the lot of the people of God in this present age. While we tend to relegate such statements to the difficulties that are common to all people, Paul had far more vicious attacks against himself than other saints when he penned these words. I do not want to depreciate the difficulties faced in the loss of a loved one, in the uncertainties of daily life or even those trials which we face in our struggles to maintain a measure of health. However, we must admit we do not suffer assault as do many of the saints in this present day.

There is a world-wide assault against Christians. That assault does not discriminate by denomination or race—it is focused on those who dare identify as believers in the Son of God. Certainly, repeated attacks by Islamists in Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Syria fill the newscasts each week.<sup>3</sup> Even individuals unaware of major news items know of Christians beheaded in various locals, though in the press of daily life we quickly forget those Christians who have been killed in Indonesia,<sup>4</sup> Nigeria and other sub-Saharan nations.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Stoyan Zaimov, “ISIS Beheads 21 Coptic Christians in ‘Message to Nation of the Cross,’” Egypt Bombs Terror Group in Response,” Christian Post, February 15, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-beheads-21-coptic-christians-in-message-to-nation-of-the-cross-egypt-bombs-terror-group-in-response-134142/>, accessed 4 June 2015; Elliott C. McLaughlin, “ISIS executes more Christians in Libya, video shows,” CNN, April 30, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/19/africa/libya-isis-executions-ethiopian-christians/index.html>, accessed 4 June 2015; Tim MacFarlane, “Four Young Christians Brutally Beheaded by ISIS for refusing to convert to Islam, says British Vicar of Baghdad forced to flee,” 12 December 2014, Daily Mail, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2871508/Four-young-Christians-brutally-beheaded-ISIS-Iraq-refusing-convert-Islam-says-Vicar-Baghdad-Canon-Andrew-White.html>, accessed 4 June 2015; Barbara Boland, “Leader: ISIS is ‘Systematically Beheading Children’ in ‘Christian Genocide,’” CNSNews, August 7, 2014, <http://www.cnsnews.com/mrctv-blog/barbara-boland/leader-isis-systematically-beheading-children-christian-genocide>, accessed 4 June 2015; Leonardo Blair, “ISIS ‘Systematically Beheading Children’ in Iraq; They Are ‘Killing Every Christian They See,’ Says Chaldean Leader,” Christian Post, August 10, 2014, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/isis-systematically-beheading-children-in-iraq-they-are-killing-every-christian-they-see-says-chaldean-leader-124594/>, accessed 4 June 2015

<sup>4</sup> “Three Schoolgirls Beheaded in Indonesia,” Fox News, October 29, 2005, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2005/10/29/three-schoolgirls-beheaded-in-indonesia.html>, accessed 4 June 2015; Daniel Greenfield, “Indonesia Frees Muslim Terrorist Who Beheaded 3 Christian Girls as ‘Ramadan Present,’” Frontpage Mag, April 26, 2013, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2013/dgreenfield/indonesia-frees-muslim-terrorist-who-beheaded-3-christian-girls-as-ramadan-present/>, accessed 4 June 2015

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Less well-publicised here in the west are the repeated attacks against Christians perpetuated by other religions such as Buddhists<sup>5</sup> and Hindus<sup>6</sup> and state-sponsored attacks.<sup>7</sup> What is obvious is that Christians do suffer death because of their faith in Christ the Lord. When various religiously motivated zealots take the life of those who follow Christ, they do not distinguish between sects and denominations—all alike who name the Name of Christ are killed.

This bitter assault against the faithful reveals the veracity of the Master's words. Though you know them very well, please listen once more in light of contemporary rage against followers of the Christ. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also" [JOHN 15:18-23].

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<sup>5</sup> "Sri Lanka: Christians protest after attacks by Buddhists extremists," Christianity Today, 29 January 2014, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/sri.lanka.christians.protest.after.attacks.by.buddhist.extremists/35605.htm>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Sri Lanka Christians protest after attacks by Buddhist extremists," Ecumenical News, January 29, 2014, <http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/sri-lanka-christians-protest-after-attacks-by-buddhist-extremists-22706>, accessed 4 June 2015; Barbara Crossette, "Buddhist Violence in Burma," The Nation, <http://www.thenation.com/article/174104/buddhist-violence-burma#>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Buddhist Monks Lead Attack on Church in Sri Lanka," Morning Star News, December 11, 2012, <http://morningstarnews.org/2012/12/buddhist-monks-lead-attack-on-church-in-sri-lanka/>, accessed 4 June 2015

<sup>6</sup> Dalit Christians, <http://www.dalitchristians.com/Html/CasteChurch.htm>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Hindu group attacks cathedral in central India, police arrest six," 23 March 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-23/hindu-group-attacks-cathedral-in-central-india-police/6342462>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Elderly nun 'gang raped' by burglars, police hunt attackers," 14 March 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-23/hindu-group-attacks-cathedral-in-central-india-police/6342462>, accessed 4 June 2014; "Hindu fundamentalists 'reconvert' Christians in Indian village," Catholic World News, <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=22422>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Karnataka: Hindu fundamentalists attack Christians again," Persecuted Church, November 8, 2014, <http://www.persecutedchurch.info/2014/11/08/karnataka-hindu-fundamentalists-attack-innocent-christians/>, accessed 4 June 2015

<sup>7</sup> "Believers in China Rejoice Despite Hardships," Persecuted Church, September 28, 2012, <http://www.persecutedchurch.info/2012/09/28/believers-in-china-rejoice-despite-hardship/>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Rimsha Masih Freed on Bail in Pakistan but Ordeal Far From Over," Persecuted Church, September 20, 2012, <http://www.persecutedchurch.info/2012/09/20/rimsha-masih-freed-on-bail-in-pakistan-but-ordeal-far-from-over/>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Christian Students in Myanmar Forced to Shave Heads, Convert to Buddhism," Persecuted Church, September 21, 2015, <http://www.persecutedchurch.info/2012/09/21/christian-students-in-myanmar-forced-to-shave-heads-convert-to-buddhism/>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Persecution of Christians in Nigeria, Laos and Iraq," Persecuted Church, September 29, 2012, <http://www.persecutedchurch.info/2012/09/29/news-in-brief-25-september-2012/>, accessed 4 June 2015; Martin Blackshaw, "British Bigotry: State-Sponsored Persecution of Christians Across the Pond," Remnant Newspaper, 3/31/09, <http://www.remnantnewspaper.com/Archives/2009-0331-blackshaw-british-bigotry.htm>, accessed 4 June 2015; Raymond Ibrahim, "Exposed: Egypt's Institutionalized Persecution of Coptic Christians," Frontpage Mag, May 6, 2015, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/raymond-ibrahim/exposed-egypts-institutionalized-persecution-of-coptic-christians/>, accessed 4 June 2015; "State Sponsored Persecution Directed Against Lao Hmong," Scoop, 30 December, 2014, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1412/S00178/state-sponsored-persecution-directed-against-lao-hmong.htm>, accessed 4 June 2015; "Persecution of Christians in China at record high," 06-05-2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Christian-News/Persecution-of-Christians-in-China-at-record-high-399334>, accessed 4 June 2015; Alex Newman, "Christian Massacres: A Result of U.S. Foreign Policy," New American, 23 April 2012, <http://www.thenewamerican.com/world-news/asia/item/10970-christian-massacres-a-result-of-us-foreign-policy>, accessed 4 June 2015

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Since so many of the people of God have suffered—and even now are suffering to the point of death, perhaps we are presumptuous in speaking of Christ conquering death. Some scholars who study persecution of the faithful suggest that more Christians have been martyred in this present era than in any other period in history. Some organisations aver that over 100,000 Christians are martyred each year.<sup>8</sup> Students of the Faith suggest that 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Christ, and that 45 million of those martyred died during the past century! This means that Christians are being brutally murdered at an astounding rate; some calculate that the rate of slaughter is eleven Christians martyred each hour for the past ten years. What is more terrible still is that the slaughter continues and is even accelerating at this time.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the text pointedly asserts that “our Saviour Jesus Christ ... “abolished death.”

We sometimes become so focused on our present condition that we forget who we are. We are physical beings; and as such, we are consumed by physical realities. The correlation of this condition is that we frequently forget that we are spiritual beings. We are living souls with a spirit; we were created to know God who is Spirit. When we speak of death, it is helpful to know what we are talking about. So, what do we mean when we speak of “death?”

Man is a tripartite being—that is, we have bodies, but each person is a soul with a spirit. Paul speaks of this when he writes the Thessalonian believers. Concluding his first letter to the persecuted saints of Thessalonica, the Apostle pens a prayer that he offers up for the readers. “May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole *spirit* and *soul* and *body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:23].

I realise that many fine Christians are prepared to argue that soul and spirit are synonymous, and that man is thus a dichotomous entity (body and spirit). I would only caution that the writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians makes an insightful assertion when he writes, “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of *soul* and of *spirit*, of joints and of marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” [HEBREWS 4:12].

What is important for the purpose of our present study is that we understand that whenever we speak of death we must not ignore the spiritual aspects of our being. To die physically is when soul and spirit are separated from the body. The soul is the life force, the animation of the physical; when the soul is absent, the body is no longer animated and we realise that the person is dead. By birth and by choice, people are dead in trespass and sin; and we remain in this state of death until redeemed by the Son of God. Hence, the soul is dead to God; the dead soul cannot know God. God is Spirit [see JOHN 4:24] and the unregenerate spirit is dead. Redemption, then, is a three-fold affair. The spirit is made new in Christ the Lord. The soul is redeemed from condemnation. And we receive the promise of a new body.

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “Counting the Cost (Accurately),” Christianity Today, August 21, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/september/counting-cost-accurately.html>, accessed 4 June 2015; “Pope: there are more Christian martyrs today than ever,” NEWS.va, 2014-07-02, <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-there-are-more-christian-martyrs-today-than-e>, accessed 4 June 2015; see also, Johan Candelin, “The Persecution of Christians Today,” Eternal Perspective Ministries, Feb 24, 2010, <http://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Feb/24/persecution-christians-today/>, accessed 4 June 2015; and Reinhard Backes, “Persecution of Christians getting worse,” Christianity Today, 17 October 2013, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/persecution.of.christians.getting.worse/34395.htm>, accessed 4 June 2015

<sup>9</sup> Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., “Martyrs of Today,” Crisis, November 20, 2012, <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2012/martyrs-of-today>, accessed 4 June 2015; for up-to-date information, consult, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org>, Voice of the Martyrs, <http://www.persecution.com>, or Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/p/persecution/>

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Armed with this knowledge, we begin to grasp the Apostle's meaning when he speaks of Christ abolishing death. His understanding is brought forcefully into focus when reading his Letter to the Ephesians. In the second chapter of that encyclical we read, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" [EPHESIANS 2:1-3]. This is the condition of all mankind in the natural state. We are born dying. We are estranged from God who is life. We come to mature years, and we reject God, holding to our own ability to make ourselves acceptable to Him. In biblical parlance, we are lost.

Paul continues as he speaks of the condition of each believer who is born from above. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" [EPHESIANS 2:4-10]. Through faith, God made us alive together with Christ. He gave us a new spirit—a spirit created to know God and to enjoy Him.

We are made alive together with Christ, receiving a new spirit from God through faith in Christ the Lord. Thus, there no longer is any possibility of being separated from God. We are alive *in* Christ and alive together *with* Christ. Thus, it is appropriate to say that Christ has abolished death. What a comforting truth is presented for believers when Paul writes, "You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross" [COLOSSIANS 2:13, 14].

Confronted with the death of a beloved friend, Jesus comforted the dead man's sisters, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" [JOHN 11:25, 26]. For the Christian, there is no death—there is an exchange for that which is better. We exchange this transient existence, leaving behind this temporary body so that we may receive a glorified body, just as promised in the Word. We are taught, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself" [PHILIPPIANS 3:20, 21].

This same wonderful promise is also recorded in the Second Letter the Apostle wrote to the Corinthian Christians. In that letter we read, "We know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

"So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-8].

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In an earlier missive to the Corinthian Christians, the Apostle spoke of Christ's victory. "Someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

"So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

"I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

'Death is swallowed up in victory.'  
'O death, where is your victory?  
O death, where is your sting?'

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-57].

Victory, indeed! The Christian does not seek death; but neither does the child of God fear death. Death has been conquered. As is noted elsewhere, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, [Christ Jesus] himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" [HEBREWS 2:14, 15].

I witnessed this transformation not so long ago. Jim was dying of an AIDS related illnesses when he came to faith in the Son of God. We spoke often of what would happen next. On one of my later visits I told him of an old country doctor who sought to comfort a dying man. As the doctor spoke, the man's long-time companion, a little terrier, scratched at the door to the bedroom seeking entrance. The doctor said, "That little dog doesn't know what is on this side of the door; but he knows who is on this side of the door. Just so, we don't know what is on the other side of this life; but we know Who is on the other side of this life." Jim seized on this story. His last words to me were, "Mike, I'm ready. I don't know what lies ahead; but I know Who is waiting for me." Death no longer holds terror for the Christian.

**CHRIST JESUS BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT** — The consequence arising from the abolition of death is that we are now alive in Christ. We speak of possessing “eternal life.” This is not a mere existence at some indefinite future time—eternal life is the new quality of life that begins now and continues throughout all eternity. Eternal life is the term that speaks of our new relationship with the True and Living God. Bear in mind that to know God is to have life.

When the Apostle delivers a final charge to Timothy, the charge is prefaced in exceptionally strong terms, “I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things...” [1 TIMOTHY 6:13].

The Apostle of Love speaks of the life we possess in Christ the Lord as he pens his first General Epistle. “This is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:11-20].

God is not some distant, austere and obscure deity. God presents Himself as “Father.” We are taught that when we pray, we are to come before Him, calling Him “Father.” Think of the repeated emphasis of this truth when Jesus delivered the message we know as “The Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus taught those who would follow Him, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to *your Father* who is in heaven” [MATTHEW 5:13-16].

Later, in the same message, Jesus taught us, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of *your Father* who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as *your heavenly Father* is perfect.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from *your Father* who is in heaven.



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“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And *your Father* who sees in secret will reward you” [MATTHEW 5:43-6:4].

We must not ignore the manner in which we are taught to pray. The passage to which I now refer is found in MATTHEW 6:5-15. “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to *your Father* who is in secret. And *your Father* who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for *your Father* knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

*“Our Father in heaven,*  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
    on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
    as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
    but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, *your heavenly Father* will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will *your Father* forgive your trespasses.”

I do not want you to imagine that there is no death. Many have read the McCreery poem, “There Is No Death.”<sup>10</sup> It is a lovely poem recited at many funerals. Unfortunately, it is heretical. McCreery had planned to train for the Methodist ministry, but became a skeptic, rejecting the Faith. The poem is modernism writ large—all dead go to heaven regardless of how they lived and regardless of their relationship to the True and Living God.

Perhaps you will recall the stern words penned in John’s Gospel. To be certain, John has just delivered that most notable statement of God’s offer of life in the Beloved Son. “God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [JOHN 3:16]. Near the end of that particular discussion is this warning. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:36]. Not all go to heaven; but those who receive the Son of God are assured of eternal life—and that life is now.

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<sup>10</sup> J. L. McCreery, “Who Wrote the Poem ‘There Is No Death’?”, The Annals of Iowa, Volume 1, Number 3, 1893, pp. 196-209, <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1932&context=annals-of-iowa&sei-redir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.bing.com%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dthere%2Bis%2Bno%2Bdeath%2BMcCreery%2Boccasion%26qs%3Dn%26pq%3Dthere%2Bis%2Bno%2Bdeath%2Bmccreery%2Boccasion%26sc%3D0-27%26sp%3D-1%26sk%3D%26evid%3Dee253f35fdbb4c178779fa9093c12581%26first%3D9%26FORM%3DPORE#search=%2there%20no%20death%20McCreery%20occasion%22>, accessed 11 June 2015



**1 TIMOTHY 1:8-10**  
**GOOD NEWS ABOUT DEATH**

The age to come has broken into this present age; and though the body is subject to death as the soul is separated from the Body, the soul shall be forever in the presence of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. We who are twice-born now have communion with Jesus Christ the Son of God. Here is what is vital for us to understand—Jesus is our life. Do you remember this justly notable assertion from the Master Himself? “*I am the resurrection and the life*. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live” [JOHN 11:25]. Again, it is recorded that Jesus testified, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*. No one comes to the Father except through Me” [JOHN 14:6]. In a practical sense, this knowledge lends power to Paul’s statement to believers, “When *Christ who is your life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” [COLOSSIANS 3:4].

Recall how the Apostle began this Second Letter to Timothy: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to *the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus*” [2 TIMOTHY 1:1]. The focus of the Letter is life lived out boldly and lived to the glory of the Father. The life now lived provides repeated and ample opportunity to reveal the power of Christ at work in the child of God. The impact of this truth is that your daily walk reflects life—real life! Moreover, your daily life affords opportunity to reveal the immortality that we now possess in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle is calling on Timothy to be bold in his witness. Paul has urged the younger servant of Christ to “fan into flame” the gift of the Spirit which was given at the time of salvation and which was recognised by the council of elders when they publicly acknowledged his gift.<sup>11</sup> Christians often shrink from testifying to the world about them with boldness and power. Believers become timid, imagining that if they speak of their life in Christ the Lord they will be rejected by friends or by family. Christians are sometimes fearful of attack, even physical assault, and so they are silent rather than speaking boldly. They don’t want to be ridiculed as people who are at odds with society and out-of-step with the times. Paul is refocusing Timothy’s gaze on who we are and what we possess. In doing this, he is refocusing the gaze of each Christian who reads what he has written.

Thus, the Apostle urges the younger minister, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10].

Don’t shrink from being who you have become in Christ the Lord. Don’t deny the power that has been entrusted to you through silence. You embody the life of Christ for the entire world to witness as you go about your daily life. You are revealing the immortality that is offered to all who receive Jesus as Master of life just by living a godly life to the glory of God the Father. You, as you testify to the grace of God and as you walk by faith in the Son of God are demonstrating that Jesus conquered death and that death therefore no longer holds you in thralldom.

You became a child of God through faith in the Son of God; therefore, His life and the immortality that He revealed through rising from the dead are being expressed through your life moment-by-moment. This is the practical import of Peter’s words, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” [1 PETER 2:12].

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<sup>11</sup> See Michael Stark, “Fan the Flame,” Sermon, 22 March 2015, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2-Timothy-1.06-Fan-the-Flame.pdf>

**CHRIST JESUS HAS ACCOMPLISHED ALL THIS THROUGH THE GOSPEL** — The life we now possess and the immortality that is ours is revealed “through the Gospel.” It is likewise secured “through the Gospel.” In the simplest sense, the Gospel is the message of God’s intervention into history to bring salvation to lost people. It is the account of Jesus death, burial and resurrection because of mankind’s fallen and helpless condition. It is the promise of life to all who believe this promise and place themselves under the reign of the Risen, Living Saviour. The Gospel is, however, much more; it is “the testimony about our Lord” as the Apostle stated in verse eight.

Writing the Corinthian Christians, Paul asserted, “You yourselves are our letter of recommendation written on our hearts, to be known and read by all” [2 CORINTHIANS 3:2]. In a similar manner, each Christian is the Gospel writ large for the entire world to read. She or he, living out the life God has given and to His glory, reflect His image and reveal the age that is shortly coming. In a sense, that age is already evident in the churches of our Lord as the people of God unite for worship and in harmony serve one another to the glory of Christ Jesus the Lord. As we worship, witness and serve, we reveal divine life and immortality to the watching world. The witness of believers is powerful; Christ Himself is at work in the lives of many individuals who might not otherwise hear the message of life.

Early in the message, I spoke of the persecution believers endure in this day. Persecutors imagine they can extirpate the Faith through assailing the followers of the Saviour. We read of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and we imagine that was something that happened two thousand years ago and is no longer repeated. As I prepared the message, I read several accounts that humbled me and encouraged me. Our God is powerful; and He works powerfully in the lives even of those who assail His beloved people. Let me share just a few of these recent accounts.

Nabeel Qureshi is one such individual. Raised by observant Muslims, he was befriended in college by a Christian. The two men frequently debated their respective religions—Islam and the Faith of Christ the Lord. Nabeel remembered in the Quran that it says, “Allah hears those who call out to him.” In the Bible Jesus offers those who wish to know the truth, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” [MATTHEW 7:7]. Nabeel prayed for Christ or for Allah to show him who was true. “By the time [Nabeel Qureshi] finished his first year of medical school, he had had a vision and three dreams in answer to his prayer. Nabeel cited Islamic tradition in which Muhammad taught that ‘the dreams of the faithful are prophetic’ and that ‘dreams are 1/46<sup>th</sup> of revelation.’”<sup>12</sup> Because of Christ’s gracious intervention, Nabeel Qureshi became a follower of Jesus who is the Christ.

Ali went to Mecca in order to pay homage to the Kabba and to fulfil the requirements in Islam. While in Mecca, Ali claims that Christ appeared in a dream, touching his forehead with His finger and saying “You belong to Me.” Then, the vision Ali saw touched him above his heart and said, “You have been saved, follow Me. You belong to Me.” After the dream, Ali pledged not to finish the pilgrimage and to follow Jesus’ voice. Soon after he became a Christian.<sup>13</sup> A similar story is told by a Turkish man who is also named Ali.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Muslim Converted Through Amazing Dream,” Denison Forum, 14 May 2014, <http://www.denisonforum.org/cultural-commentary/1038-muslim-converted-through-amazing-dream>, accessed 12 June 2015

<sup>13</sup> Billy Hallowell, “Is Jesus Christ Reaching Out to Muslims Through Their Dreams?” The Blaze, Jul 5, 2012, <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2012/07/05/is-jesus-christ-reaching-out-to-muslims-through-their-dreams/>, accessed 4 June 2015

<sup>14</sup> “Ali (Turkey),” More Than Dreams, <http://morethandreams.org/ali.html>, accessed 4 June 2015

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Similar accounts can be provided of Khalil, a radical Egyptian terrorist who came to faith after seeing Jesus in a dream.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Mulinde saw Jesus in a vision and became a Christian, though he was horribly persecuted because of his faith.<sup>16</sup> Another account relates how an ISIS fighter endeavoured to follow Jesus after he dreamed of a man in white who told him, “You are killing My people.”<sup>17</sup>

Allow me to relate another exciting account of God at work in a place we would not expect Him to work. Tom Doyle has written a book entitled “Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?”<sup>18</sup> In the book, Doyle tells of an Egyptian evangelist who was roused from his bed at gunpoint and forced into a room where he was convinced he would be executed. Assembled in that room was a group of imams who had been converted to Christ through visions and dreams—they wanted the evangelist to teach them the Bible. Another chapter in that book speaks of a woman in Saudi Arabia who met Jesus in her dreams. She now worships in her washroom as she prays for her husband to come to Christ.<sup>19</sup> Even now God is working powerfully to turn many Muslims to faith in the Son of God.

I have been blessed to have known and to have worked with some wonderful Messianic Christians—Jewish people who came to faith in Jesus as the Son of God. As I prepared the message for today, I listened to some powerful testimonies of individual Jews converted to Yeshua Ha Mashiach—Jesus the Messiah—as I pursued the pages of a newer web site.<sup>20</sup> Many came to faith through a kindness, through observing a Christian living out a godly life or through receiving a testimony of God’s grace. God is working powerfully among the Jewish people in this day. What God is doing among Muslims and Jews He is also doing among Buddhists and Hindus, animists and atheists. God is turning even nominal Christians to new life in His Son!

The Gospel was powerful when Paul penned the words of our text; the Gospel is still powerful in the lives of God’s people today. The call to each of us who know Jesus as Master is to determine that we will take to heart the Apostle’s admonition, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Amen.

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<sup>15</sup> Hallowell, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Billy Hallowell, “Former Muslim and Acid Attack Victim Claims Jesus Spoke to Him in a Dream, Forever Changing His Life, The Blaze, Aug 15, 2013, <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2013/08/15/former-muslim-and-acid-attack-victim-claims-jesus-spoke-to-him-in-a-dream-forever-changing-his-life/>, accessed 4 June 2015

<sup>17</sup> Nicola Menzie, “Report: ISIS Fighter Who ‘Enjoyed’ Killing Christians Wants to Follow Jesus After Dreaming of Man in White Who Told Him ‘You Are Killing My People,’” Christian Post, June 3, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/report-isis-fighter-who-enjoyed-killing-christians-wants-to-follow-jesus-after-dreaming-of-man-in-white-who-told-him-you-are-killing-my-people-139880/>, accessed 4 June 2015; “ISIS Fighter Stops Beheading Christians After Meeting Jesus In A Vision, ‘You’re Killing My People,’” Inquisitr, June 4, 2015, <http://www.inquisitr.com/2144390/isis-fighter-stops-beheading-christians-after-meeting-jesus-in-a-vision-youre-killing-my-people/>, accessed 4 June 2015; Leah Marieann Klett, “Violent ISIS Fighter Converts to Christianity After Encountering Jesus Christ In Powerful Dream,” Jun 03, 2015, <http://www.gospelherald.com/articles/55860/20150603/violent-isis-fighter-converts-to-christianity-after-encountering-jesus-christ-in-powerful-dream.htm>, accessed 4 Jun 2015

<sup>18</sup> Tom Doyle, **Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?** (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN 2012)

<sup>19</sup> Related in “Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?”, 4 September 2012, Denison Forums, <http://www.denisonforum.org/cultural-commentary/504-is-jesus-awakening-the-muslim-world>, accessed 12 June 2015

<sup>20</sup> I Met Messiah, <http://imetmessiah.com/>