

VOC May, 2015

## The New Life

Hello Dear Listeners;

Life can be a struggle. If you've ever visited a premie ward in a hospital that fact stares out at you. Tiny babies, some weighing only a pound or two are hooked up to lifelines, to help them breathe, receive life-supporting medication, etc.

And at the other end of the spectrum, in nursing homes or rehabilitation centres? Here you see people just trying to cope with the frailties of older age. Here a paraplegic, struggling for some measure of mobility. There someone in palliative care, life's journey here below close to its end.

Then to think as well of those facilities caring for those struggling with life's problems. People being helped with depression, the trials of schizophrenia, and post traumatic stress disorders. These very real struggles can put a terrible damper and a burden on life.

Yet Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whose death and resurrection the Christian church celebrated a few weeks ago said to the Jews and their leaders when He was on earth, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" John 10: 10.

He was speaking to those he called "the sheep" . For He claimed to be "The good shepherd" who would lay down His life to save his sheep!

So what does it mean to have life "to the full" , " abundant life" as we could also read? And what did the apostle Paul mean when he wrote to the church at Rome that "*Just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*"

*The reality of “A new life” or, as the bible also calls it, the “new birth”, is truly one of the most exciting and amazing doctrines of the Christian Church. It may appear to be a mystery to many yet the Lord Jesus Himself makes it clear to that man Nicodemus in the Gospel of John, ch. 3. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council and he came to see Jesus at night. Though he didn’t ask Jesus a question the latter read his mind and declared, “ I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” ( John 3: 3).*

We read about Nicodemus’ visit to Jesus in the gospel of John, ch. 3. Though he would surely have known the Old Testament he was confused about this new birth, or, as it also is called, *regeneration*. Nicodemus asked, “ *How can a man be born when he is old?*” “ *Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!*” ( v. 4).

Then Jesus answered, “ *I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit*” (vb. 6)

What did Jesus mean but that water, or better, the water of baptism is not enough. God the Holy Spirit the Great Cleanser or Sanctifier “*must plant in your heart the life from above!*”<sup>1</sup>

That’s new life, real life, and in the way of faith it is even, *everlasting life*. It is that being born again in which a person, who is really a “*walking corpse, spiritually dead*” dominated by sin and all its desires, is made *whole*, is *justified, declared “Innocent”* in the eyes of God, and is *cleansed, sanctified* . *This* in an amazing process of shunning, hating sin more and more, and instead, living a life of joyful obedience before the LORD.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary of the Gospel According to John, p. 134

This is what the apostle Paul said about it to the church at Corinth, a church that had many grievous, deadly faults.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. ( 2 Corinthians 5: 17).*

The churches that sponsor this broadcast in one of their Confessions of Faith, called the Heidelberg Catechism, confess, among other things, that one of the benefits of Christ's resurrection is that believers, are raised with Him to a new life.

That's not their idea. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself. The apostle Peter, writing to faithful Christians scattered throughout what today is called Turkey gave them this encouragement:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never spoil or fade..... ( 1 Peter 1: 3, 4)*

Wow, what a transformation that is! From a hopeless, hapless, sin-stained existence a person is so changed, inwardly and, to a certain extent, even outwardly. Yes, for this marvel of rebirth will certainly have a lot to do with a person's life-style, one's demeanour, and conduct.

No, this doesn't mean such a person will have no more struggles, trials, disappointments, or for that matter, enemies! Immediately after Peter tells those faithful Christians scattered throughout the province of Asia Minor of new birth and a living hope in Jesus Christ he says, "*Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer in all kinds of trials.*"

He also told them the reason for these trials.

*These have come so that your faith- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1 Peter 1:7

We need also to realize that this new birth brings with it new priorities and responsibilities. We will quit trying to earn our own salvation. We'll certainly desire most heartily to serve this Living God and Saviour uprightly, sincerely. We'll realize more and more our calling to serve the Lord according to His Word and to be joined to that fellowship of believers who also desire the same.

Someone says, "*Live life to the fullest*" "*Do what you like to do. After all, life is short so be bold!*" "You only get one chance. Make the chores you have to do into a meditation," and as Max Ehrmann said in his poem or anecdote, "*Go placidly amidst the noise and haste.*"

Yet outside of Christ and the Holy Spirit, casting aside God's Word , "a lamp to your feet and a light to your path" you'll ultimately dig yourself deeper into a hole.

But if you believe in Jesus Christ who alone is able to make you wise unto salvation you will never be sorry you were joined to Him. There will come a day when all things will be made new. Long ago God's people went into captivity because they had sinned grievously against the LORD. Yet even while they were in Babylon, for seventy long years the Lord had his prophet Jeremiah address them with these words:

*I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you , plans to give you hope and a future.*

It was a promise not only that their captivity would come to an end but one which reached far into the future, even to the coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And he has come, and he will come again, The apostle John, who wrote the last Book of the Bible, that of Revelation, was allowed to see something of the new heaven and the new earth which will come about on what the bible calls the “*last day*”. He saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem and the One who was seated on the throne who said, “ *I am making everything new*” ( *Rev. 21: 5*)

May it be that you and I will treasure the new life in Jesus Christ. So then, lift up your hearts to Him who today is seated in glory and majesty at the right hand of the Father, a position of honor and authority that is second to none.

Are there struggles, disappointments and challenges in your life? Is your old sinful nature still active, still restless, often eager to listen to the deceit of the devil? Look to Christ, Open God’s Word, be constant in prayer and He whose word is sure will not yet you down. He will lift you up, and make you “walk on mountains, beyond the reach of foes”. Only, believe, confess your sins and seek refuge in Him.

Amen and thanks so much for listening.