

ALIVE
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**A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 12, 1880,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding and I shall live.”
Psalm 119:144.*

YESTERDAY afternoon I was the subject of a somewhat singular circumstance. An esteemed friend and relative came over to my house, evidently laboring under great disturbance of mind, and having inquiries to make of a very important order. I was, at the time, walking in the garden, so that I did not see him, and he appeared to have great difficulty in mentioning the subject of his concern to my wife. At last it came out that he had seen a gentleman who had informed him that it was generally rumored that I had been taken ill with heart disease, and had died in a very short time. My friend came to the point by cautious degrees, and asked at length if I was seriously ill. “No,” was the joyful reply of my beloved, “he is much the same as usual.” Then it was clear I was not dead, and the great fear was removed. The question was put, “Would you like to see him?” But my kind friend was perfectly satisfied, and was too full of joy to wish to linger—he would go back and answer with certainty the many inquiries which continued to be made at the Tabernacle. How the report originated, I am quite at a loss to tell. It has evoked much kindness, but it is rather odd to feel called upon to assure your friends that you are yet alive! I can but show myself, and ask my friends to see for themselves if I look like a dead man! When the peculiarity of the position had given place to other thoughts, it struck me in a solemn manner that the report might have been true, and my death will assuredly be a fact one day unless our Lord should come speedily. Only sparing mercy from God’s right hand has prevented it being true at this moment. We do not realize our mortality unless we are startled into a recognition of it. We believe others to be mortal, and are not much surprised when they fall, but we have a secret notion that no axe will, for the present, be laid at our root. Yet reason would lead a man to ask, “It happens to many, to die suddenly, why should it not happen to me?” I regard the incident as a call to me to stand ready to depart at any time. Let it be a warning to you, also, to set your houses in order, for in a moment death may surprise you!

A practical lesson may be gathered from the very natural scene which followed my friend’s departure. I came in from my walk, and found myself suddenly seized by my wife with both hands—grasping the front of my coat she turned me round, and looked at me steadily with a most tender gaze, declaring that she must take a double look at me, and hold me before her eyes to be quite sure that her husband was yet alive to her unutterable joy. This special outpouring of thankfulness might have been lost had it not been for the rumor, and so far, it is well. May all of you be moved to the same feeling towards your dear ones whenever they come home at night alive! What would you do without them? What desolation would it cause in the house if a messenger hurriedly rushed into your house with the news of their sudden death? How we ought to love those who are spared to us, and to praise God to think they are still alive. Suppose they were suddenly removed—have we valued them rightly? Try and act towards them as you would act if you knew that they would die today. If husband or wife had died, what a sorrow it would be if an unkind word had been spoken, or a difference had arisen just before the last look! What a painful cause for future regret! Let your affection to those about you gush forth freely as you reflect that God has spared them to you. Bless God, good woman, that you are a wife and not a widow! Bless God, Christian man, that you sit side by side with your dear spouse, and have not to go weeping to her grave. What a blank! What a darkness! What a gloom would come over your household if either of the parents should be suddenly taken away! Therefore, praise God and be thankful, and let us try to live towards one another, and towards our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus in such a way as we should wish to have done if they were suddenly to be taken. Pray for your pastor the more earnestly because you might, this morning, have missed him from your midst—and he will try and preach more earnestly to you because you may be gone before he will have another opportunity of addressing you. Let us continue knit together in love as long as we live, for the tie which now binds us together may soon be snapped. Out of a painful rumor may thus come a great blessing to families and congregations if it shall cause an increase

of mutual love, and an outpouring of united gratitude for sparing mercies! So much for a lesson as to this mortal life.

By this incident I was further led to turn a heart-glance upon myself, and to say, "I wonder whether there is any question as to whether I am alive in the *higher* sense?" That I am alive as to my *natural* life is clear enough—but is my *spiritual* life equally evidenced? This is a very necessary inquiry, for it is easy enough to make a fair show in the flesh, and yet to be alienated from the life of God. Many abide in death, even as the apostle says—"To be carnally-minded is death; but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace." The inquiry came home to my own heart, and therefore I suggest it to yours, for it may profit you. Brothers and sisters, do you live unto God? Are you walking as those who are alive from the dead? Remember, my sisters, that it is written, "She that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives"—may no woman here come under that condemnation! Brothers, I call upon you, also, to remember the word of the Lord Jesus to the church of Sardis, "I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead." Many exist upon the face of the earth, but into "life" they have never entered. They know not the Spirit, and because they are strangers to *His* indwelling, they live after the flesh, and mind the things of the flesh, and of these it is written, "If you live after the flesh you shall die." Ask yourselves, then, these questions—have you been quickened from your death in trespasses and sins? Does the divine life beat within you in such a forceful and healthful manner that there can be no question about it? Is your life "hid with Christ in God" and are you numbered with the living in Zion? The living, the living! He shall praise you, O God, as we do this day!

My subject is life—may the Lord of life help me to speak of it after a lively manner! A consideration of the text will help in the inquiry as to whether we live unto God or not, and it may further help those who sigh after the divine life to discover the way of divine quickening. Let us again read the text, "The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live."

Here we have a touchingly humble prayer for life—"Give me understanding and I shall live." We will first consider this prayer in its simplicity. Secondly, I shall try to open it up more fully, and thirdly, we will go still deeper, and search into the argument upon which the prayer is founded. There is a something about God's testimonies which will impart and sustain life, therefore the putting of the two sentences together—"The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding and I shall live."

I. First, then, let us CONSIDER THIS PRAYER IN ITS SIMPLICITY. Without diving into its depths, let us see what lies upon its surface. This prayer is adapted for very general use. It would suit a child, and be equally becoming from a venerable father. It might fall from the lips of those in whom there is but the faintest sign of divine grace, and it might as fitly be used by those in whom grace is ripening into glory!

We ask you to notice, first, that this is a suitable prayer for the awakened sinner. He discovers himself to be guilty, and he perceives that there is a punishment for sin, and so far he understands his position. Alarmed by his conscience, he thinks he sees the Judge upon the great white throne about to pronounce the final sentence, and he knows what it must be, for it is written, "The soul that sins, it shall die." So far he understands well enough. He hears, also, that there is life, life in Christ Jesus, life for guilty men—but his mind is much confused with many terrors, and with the horrible dread of the sure consequences of his sin. He has sufficient faith in the revelation of God to know that there is life in a look at the Crucified One, but he does not quite understand what that look *means*. He knows that there is salvation in one name, and in no other, but he does not quite comprehend what that faith is which obtains for a sinner the virtue of that saving name. Then is his time to pray, "Give me understanding, and I shall live." He needs illumination for his darkened mind that he may see the way of salvation; that he may look to Christ, and by understanding the doctrine of His substitutionary sacrifice, may be enabled, at once, to trust in Jesus and live! Christ is our life, but we need understanding, or we shall miss it. It is a blessed understanding which enables a man to feel that though the sentence of death may be in his members, yet he must and shall live if he believes in the Lord Jesus! What did the Lord Jesus say in His prayer for His people? "And this is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." I pray you will, dear hearers, if you feel your need of this life, let the prayer of the text go up quietly from your hearts—"Give me understanding, and I shall live." Equally applicable, however, will this be in the case of one who is a Christian, and who is struggling against temptation. Perhaps, my brother, you are placed in a position where you are fiercely tempted from without by the world, and possibly you may fear that you will not be able to survive it. It comes with such force that you are staggered by its power! You feel that you cannot bear up under such pressure! You

despair of your spiritual life! Well, then, ask God to bring home His word to your heart, that you may act wisely, and may meet the rebuke of the ungodly, and the temptations of the wicked—prudently baffling the adversary by your sacred vigilance. Pray, “Give me understanding, and I shall live,” for a clear understanding is necessary for your preservation from the enemy. May God make you wise as serpents and harmless as doves!

Possibly the temptation comes from within you. There are passions within you which, at times, violently rebel, and you are in anguish while you struggle to mortify them, though mortified they must be. Your soul abhors evil, and wrestles against the lusts of the flesh, agonizing that you may walk before God in integrity, pleasing Him in all things. At times you are harshly beset, and Satan, himself, draws near to aid the flesh with his fearful insinuations, or even by injecting blasphemous thoughts. Then is your hour of peril, for you are pressed out of measure while the enemy howls at you—“The Lord has forsaken you! Your God will be gracious no more!” Ah, then you need to know how to handle your weapons, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and that master weapon of all-prayer! Perhaps you feel yourself so confused that you do not know what Scripture to plead in prayer, nor do you know what you should pray for as you ought. Well, then, remember the blessed word of Scripture, “If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not.” Let this be your prayer—“Give me understanding, and I shall live, in spite of the assaults of the enemies.” Though there are fights without, and fears within, we shall overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and we shall live as Christian men, adorning the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things if the Lord will give us a clear understanding of His word, and holy prudence and judgment by which we shall know how to behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way.

Do you not think that this prayer will often well up from the heart of the suffering believer? To some of our dear brothers and sisters, life is one long pang, for bodily disease has fixed its fangs in their flesh. There are others whose life is always from hand to mouth, and sometimes bread is scant in the cupboard so that grinding poverty breaks them to dust. These are sore ills for those know who have to bear them. Some, too, are subject to domestic trials, watching daily the pining away of one they love, or bereavement has followed bereavement till they seem left alone in the land. Alas, the insatiate archer has taken a poisoned arrow from his quiver, yet again, and again, and love has had to weep over the terrible accuracy of his aim. Beloved ones who have been called to suffer in these ways, have you not cried out at times, “I shall never be able to bear it! I shall die of a broken heart under these great afflictions! O that I might hide in the grave”? You fear that you will perish if the pressure continues, but you will do no such thing! God will help you to bear your burden by sustaining your soul with heavenly meat that others know nothing of. If the load is not made lighter, the shoulders shall be made stronger, and this shall be done by your having a clearer understanding of the word of God, and a fuller experience of its supporting power! You do not so much need health, or wealth, or freedom from trouble, as more understanding of the Lord’s mind and will in all the dispensations of His providence. Breathe, then, the prayer to your heavenly Father—“Give me understanding, and I shall live.” Divine grace can make us live like the three holy children in the fire, or like Jonah at the bottom of the sea, or like Daniel in a den of lions! It can make us patient in tribulation, and joyful in distress—and grace works by making us understand the word of the Lord. Brethren, if we are taught of the Lord, we can live between the jaws of death, and sing a song unto our Well-beloved amid the wailings of famine and pestilence! By a God-given understanding, we shall know that all things work together for our good, and so we shall “take pleasure in infirmities, in necessities, and in distresses,” for when we are weak, then are we strong!

I thank God that a large number now present are not so much sufferers as workers. Now, I know that you who are working for God, and trying to win souls often feel as if you were not half alive. I am compelled to make such a confession myself. I need to get alive to the utmost—not only having life, but having it “more abundantly.” I have some life in me, thank God, but I need it to quicken me more completely! Sometimes we get into a sleepy state, and then the Spirit chides us, and we cry, “This will never do.”—

*“Dear Lord! Shall we always live
At this poor dying rate?
Our love so faint, so cold to You,
And You to us so great?”*

We need quickening, brothers and sisters! Do you not feel that it is so? I believe that those who are most earnest are the very persons who blame themselves the most for need of earnestness. When your whole soul is being consumed, you feel as if you need the coals of juniper to be blown up to a yet more vehe-

ment flame that you may go up like a cloud of incense unto God, dissolved in His service, consumed in His praise! Here, then, is our prayer, “Give me understanding, and I shall live. Make me so to feel the power of Your Word that I may be ardent, fervent, full of life!” I will alter the poet’s lines and say—

*“Lives of saintly men assure us
We may make our lives sublime.”*

We can live to noble purpose if, in answer to this prayer, God the Holy Spirit shall teach us to profit, and give us understanding to know the will of the Lord, and obey it faithfully. O you who would work successfully and acceptably, ask the great Lord of the Harvest to enlighten your hearts and minds that you may not labor as in the dark, but as wise men made expert by the Holy Spirit.

Is not this a very proper and blessed prayer for aspiring minds in the church of God, of whom I trust there are many present? Such men are not satisfied with themselves, but press forward to that which is yet beyond and above them. They have not reached that imaginary climax which some prattle of who dote upon their fancied perfectness—but their motto is, “Onward! Upward! Heavenward!” These dwell on high, but their cry is, “Higher! Higher!” They walk with God and therefore say—

“Oh for a closer walk with God.”

They are calm and happy, but yet they sigh for a still serener frame. They have power in prayer, but they long for more of a wrestling spirit, and for greater prevalence with God. If there are any here who are fired with such divine ambitions, what better prayer can they use than this—“Give me understanding, and I shall live”? For if God teaches us rightly to use the divine word so as to mark, learn, and inwardly digest it by the understanding, then shall we be nourished into complete manhood, and shall go from strength to strength! The new man is renewed in knowledge, and nourished by the truth of God and, “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” Our prayer must be that the Lord would make us understand what He would have us do, and how to do it. Then shall we live when we are made of “quick understanding in the fear of the Lord” and ready in heart to perfect all His will. This will be an angelic life, for those holy beings do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. It will be a seraphic life, for as we burn with holy fervor, we shall resemble those ministers whom God makes to be a flaming fire! It will be a heavenly life, for we shall strive to do the Lord’s will on earth as it is done in heaven. Do you long for this? The way to it is not to be found in dreams, and visions and fanatical excitements, and delirious conceits, but in a calm, quiet, solid, and deep understanding of the revealed word of God! Our Lord prayed—“Sanctify them through Your truth, Your word is truth.” No other means are needed for the fullest development of holiness—you only require the word to be unveiled by the Spirit to your mind and understanding, and in the utmost sense of the term you shall “live.”

Last of all, when we shall not be so much aspiring saints as *expiring* saints—when we come to lie upon our last bed, and to look into the unseen—then may we still pray after the same fashion! When the eyes shall begin to open to the light of heaven, and things but darkly seen, before, grow clearer in the dawn of the eternal day—when the songs of angels begin to break upon the opening ears of the soul, and heaven is drawing near, for grace is ripening into glory, and glory is coming to welcome its heir—then may we pray to live through the understanding and experience of the divine word! How blessed it will be to have such an understanding of divine realities that we shall stay ourselves upon the promises, shall rejoice in the everlasting covenant and derive strong consolation from the oath of God. How blessed, then, to understand our living union with our risen Lord, and to know the experience of the happy psalmist when He sang—“Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me.” With God’s Spirit within us lighting up the soul by the understanding of the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, we shall live in the midst of death, and find our Savior’s words to be true—“He that lives and believes in Me shall never die.” We shall ford that shallow stream of death, which, while it chills our feet, shall not be able to chill our hearts! It may stop our pulse, but it shall not silence our song which shall rise higher and higher as speech shall fail. We shall but shut our eyes on earth, and open them in heaven, for God, who has given us understanding here below shall, surely, give us to dwell above where they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament!

And thus, I think I have shown you that this prayer sounds well on every note of the scale. You may sound it out of the depths of seeking penitence, and you may run up to the very highest note with the expectancy of glory, and the words will sound well on any note you touch. From the wicket gate of humble faith up to the gate of pearl which admits into the golden city, you may go on praying, “Give me understanding, and I shall live.”

II. The time has come when under our second division THE PRAYER IS TO BE MORE FULLY OPENED UP. “Give me understanding, and I shall live.” Here is a need confessed because it is deeply felt—the suppliant acknowledges his need of understanding. Has that need been felt by you, my brothers and sisters? It certainly exists, “For vain man would be wise, though man is born like a wild ass’s colt.” The wittiest, wisest, best instructed man who has only human learning, if he knows not God, has reached no further than that acme of all carnal wisdom spelled in four letters, “FOOL.” We are all fools till God gives us understanding! A sense of our own folly is the first step of all wisdom. To cry out after understanding proves that we have already received some understanding, for mark you, this text of mine is the prayer of a man of God! I suppose the 119th is David’s psalm—at any rate it is the psalm of a very gracious Spirit-taught man, and you see he still cries, even though he has understanding in a measure, “Give me understanding.” He that is taught of God is the man that asks to be taught of God, and she who has chosen the good part is the woman who sits at Jesus’ feet to hear His words. It is the mark of a wise man that he does not think himself so, and that he continues to pray, “Give me understanding.” It is true of us all, that apart from the gifts of God, by His Spirit, we are without understanding, and as naturally go astray as silly sheep. Note this fact, and be well persuaded of it, that you may pray with the greater earnestness.

Next, the prayer is evidently put upon the footing of free grace. He prays, “Give me understanding”—it must be a *gift* from God. The prayer is directed to God, for God, alone, can give understanding. Teachers can enlighten an understanding which already exists, but they cannot give one. Masters and instructors can profit nothing till we have an understanding with which to receive knowledge aright. Any man who is taught in the word can teach us the *letter* of Scripture, but no man can give us an inner understanding of its *spirit*—that must be a revelation, and it must be worked in us by Him that made the light and the sun, or we shall never come to an understanding of the word of God! Let it always be known that all light of God is from the Lord Jesus, Himself—“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” “That was the true light which lights every man that comes into the world.” All real understanding of the word of God must come to us as it did to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, of whom it is written, “Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.” The author of the sacred volume must, Himself, expound it to the heart and understanding, or we shall be blinded by its light rather than made to see. David prayed, “Open You my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law” and we must pray the same. When the Lord graciously hears our supplications, we must take care to give Him all the praise and glory of the work, for it will be a deed of grace and grace alone. If He left us in darkness, we could not complain, for we have refused the light, and if He opens our eyes, we must glorify His mercy, and cry, “Blessed be the Lord who has shown us light.”

Brothers and sisters, the Psalmist speaks of understanding in a general way—“Give me understanding”—as if he wanted the faculty for use in many directions. In every transaction of this life we need to be prudent, for we are surrounded by a thousand snares and pitfalls, and if we do not exercise discretion, we shall be taken all unawares, and become the prey of our enemies. We bear within our own natures so much to confuse, and confound, and entangle that if we are not taught prudence and understanding we shall certainly never escape from the mischief that is within us. We are frequently like men in a fog who cannot tell where they are. It happened but the other day near Milan that so dense a fog covered the railway that a number of workmen who were employed upon the line heard the sound of an approaching luggage train, and rushed to get away from it—but at that same moment an express train, which they had not heard or seen, came rushing upon them and cut them to pieces. Such is our condition at times—we try to get away from one temptation, and we fall into another—we hope to escape one form of evil, and we rush into another! Haste breeds heedlessness, and warmth of zeal is apt to beget indiscretion so that we daily need a good share of understanding as a ballast to our sail. A Christian should be a sensible man, a man with all his wits about him. He needs to possess the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs as well as the devotion of the Psalms, and the rapture of Solomon’s Song. Those books are placed together in the Bible as if to show that they ought to be read together, and that their spirit and influence are essential to a complete practical character. I would have you bow your ears to the voice of your Well-beloved, but you must also be ready to deal with the voices of everyday life. It is one of the objects of true religion to give subtlety to the simple, and to the young man, knowledge and discretion. We must not be ignorant of the devices of the devil, nor childish in yielding credence to the falsehoods of men. We need, in all the walks of life, to exercise understanding, and thank God, we may learn to do so, for the Scriptures say, “The Lord gives wisdom: out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He lays up sound wis-

dom for the righteous: He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keeps the paths of judgment, and preserves the way of His saints.”

Still, while the understanding sought for in the prayer is evidently of a general character, the former portion of the verse links it with a special understanding of the word of God, and, oh, beloved, we need, above all things, to understand what God has revealed! Take care, first, that you know it. Search the Scriptures—let them be the man of your right hand. Prevent the night watches while you search them. Prevent the dawn of the day by meditating upon them. Be you scribes well-instructed in the law of the Lord. Next, *believe* the divine revelation. Be it your prayer that you may so understand the Lord’s statutes as fully to accept them by faith. Believe the teachings of the word as realities, not locking them up in the dark dungeon of a forgotten creed, but making them bright realities in the life and liberty of your Christian action, and full of influence upon every movement of your mind. Knowing and believing, it will be time to advance to meditation. Consider the words of God—weigh them, test them, dive into them. The richest ore lies deepest. There may be sands of gold sparkling upon the surface of the Bible, but the great nuggets are reserved for those who dig deep both by day and by night! Consider well the words of eternal life, and then go on to obey their teaching. You will never have an understanding of the word unless you practice it. He who does the will of God shall know of the doctrine. We know nothing aright till our hearts come into complete subjection to the Spirit. Oh for such an understanding as this, that the inner life may be nourished to fullness of stature by feeding on the bread from heaven! To this must be added experience, for who understands the word of God till he has experienced its truth and power? What a blessed knowledge of a promise you receive when it is fulfilled to you! How you understand the reality of prayer when you have received an answer! How you know the meaning of communion with Christ when your face shines with having seen Him! How you understand the secret consolations of the Holy Spirit when, in deep water, you have felt their wondrously lifting power!

This prayer means so much that in one sermon I cannot open it all up to you. Nor, indeed, could I do so were a lifetime at my disposal! O Lord, give us understanding to know, to believe, to consider, to practice, and to experience Your word! Let each man cry, “O God, give me this, and then I shall truly live!” I think you will begin to see what a connection there is between all this, and the testimonies of the Lord, for the righteousness of the divine word is to be transcribed into the letter of our daily life if we are to live to the fullest.

Permit me, now, to say that no man who is at all awakened can really live unless he knows the word of God, and understands its inner meaning. For this reason—Do you call it life to live without the light of God? You may have been in the sepulchral dungeons of Venice where not a ray of light ever came to the unhappy prisoners. To linger there, do you call that life? To live without the light of God is just such an existence! We have heard of men who have been immured in dungeons for 40 years, constantly wearing manacles, never breathing fresh air—do you call that life? Can there be “life” where there is no liberty? Alas, some men have never been free, but have remained captives to their lusts, never knowing the liberty with which Christ makes men free. Do you call such bondage, life? Another essential of life is love. To have nobody to love, and nobody to love you—is that life? Yet many a soul feels that it cannot be content with *earthly* love, and yet if it has not the love of God, the love of Christ, the love of the Spirit, it is loveless! Do you call that life? Infinite love is a necessity of an immortal spirit. Without light, without liberty, without love there is no life. But more, many men exist without peace—driven to and fro like a sere leaf by the tempest. Never resting, they are as a rolling thing before the whirlwind. Do you call that life? “There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.” Is that life? And then to have no grand objective, no objective worthy of yourself—to be living in this world merely to get enough bread and cheese to eat, just keeping yourself breathing, and your family breathing—is that life? No heavenly objective? No ambition worthy of an immortal spirit? Do you call that life? Death before you, which you dare not think of! No hope, unless it is the ghastly figment of annihilation! Dreadful hope! To me a thought most horrible! To live without hope is not life—far rather call it death. Lord, give me understanding of Your everlasting testimonies—then I shall live, but I shall never live till You grant me this gift!

III. Now we will take the third step and go deeper, LAYING BARE THE ARGUMENT OF THIS PRAYER. What does he mean by saying, “The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live”? I think he means this—that the word of God, when it is practically and experimentally understood by the mind, is a pledge of life. Do you think that God would take one of us to be His child, and teach us His word, and then, after all, permit us to be condemned to die? Is that His fashion? Did you ever hear of a judge who instructed a criminal in the arts and sciences laboriously

for years with the view of executing him when the task was done? Nothing of the sort! If the Lord has taught you, it is because the Lord has bought you, and He will not lose the purchase of His blood! If the Lord has taught you, it is because He means to take you where your education will be completed—to take you home to dwell with Him above! “Give me understanding, and I shall live”—I am quite clear about that. If You, great God, have made me understand the evil of sin, the preciousness of the blood of Christ, the power of Your Spirit, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—if You have made me experimentally to understand this, I know I shall live, for You will not make me ashamed of my hope—

*“Can He have taught me to trust in His name,
And have brought me thus far to put me to shame?”*

The next argument is this—an understanding of the word of God is life because we are told that the word of God is the “living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever.” Very well, then, if that seed is sown in my heart, my heart must live forever. There can be no death where the seed is incorruptible! If the word of the Lord is living within us, then there is within us a life eternal! Be you sure of this, then—if you have enjoyed a vital experience of God’s word, you have within you a well of water springing up into everlasting life!

Furthermore, the word of God is not only the seed of life, but it is the food of life. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God shall man live.” And if you live on the word that comes out of God’s mouth, you cannot die. How can you? For in the word of God you read of the “flesh,” which is, “meat indeed,” and that “blood” which is, “drink indeed.” And the incarnate word, Himself, has said, “He that eats Me, the same shall live by Me. Because I live, you shall live, also.” There is forcible argument here!

Once more, the understanding of God’s word is the very flower, and crown, and glory of true life. When a man so understands God’s word as to experience it, and to practice it, he has reached a high point of spiritual culture, and his life will be loaded, like Aaron’s rod, with buds, and blossoms, and fruit unto God’s glory! He will be such a man that he shall only need to take one step and be in heaven! He is a shock of corn fully ripe, each single stalk bowing its head towards the earth as if it asked to be gathered in. Let us pray God will give us an understanding of His blessed word, for then we shall be ripe for glory, and in the highest sense it will be true that we shall “live.”

I have scarcely a minute to spare, but I must venture to detain you while we observe that the Psalmist alludes to one point in reference to God’s word which is, to us, the very marrow and fatness of the whole. God’s word is said to be righteous—“The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting.” Now, upon this righteousness the life of every Christian hangs. “God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, and labor of love.” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” A righteous God cannot destroy a man in whom His grace has worked an understanding of His word, for that were to deal unrighteously with him, since he is justified by the knowledge of Christ. The godly serve a just God, and a Savior, and therefore, they have nothing to fear.

This righteousness of God’s word is so certain that it is said to be everlasting. Brothers and sisters, my life hangs on the everlastingness of all God’s word! If it can change, then I must die—but if it cannot change, then I shall live. The righteousness of God, according to the text, is everlasting since none can challenge it. No caviler will ever prove God’s way of salvation, or of providence, to be unrighteous. If that could be done, then the believer might die. But since that righteousness cannot be disproved, he shall live. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” The divine righteousness stands fast forever and ever, settled in heaven, ordained to answer all demands throughout all ages. Let us so understand it as to take it to be ours, and we shall live!

I cannot understand the notion of certain professing Christians that a change comes over Christianity as the ages move on—that there is a Christianity for the first century, and a revised Christianity for the present era! We have become very enlightened of late! You are aware that this is the marvelous 19th Century! We have invented the electric light, and none can deny that we are the most enlightened people that ever lived on the face of the earth! It is not, of course, pride on our part to say so, for we are very modest. Among us there are men who are wonderfully brilliant—Paul was but a farthing candle compared with them. They understand, by culture and thought, so much that it is an *honor* to speak with them! The gospel that was preached to the poor, which childlike persons understood by the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, is, in their eyes a very poor business. They sneer and turn up their cultured noses at what they call, “the simple gospel,” as if a simple gospel were meant for simpletons. Well, now, to my mind this is the very bliss and blessedness of the gospel—that the righteousness of God’s testimonies is everlasting—that though it has been tried by criticism, and tested by experience, it remains the

same in its spotless purity and in its divine infallibility to this day! If God should be pleased to lengthen out the life of any of you till you are as old as Methuselah, you will not have to say, "I must die now, for the gospel is worn out. I must perish now, for the righteousness of the word of God has been disproved." Thus says Jehovah, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." We may catch the echo of His proclamation, and say, "Because the word which reveals our God never changes, therefore we shall live."

Do you need a better gospel, any of you? Go and fish for it, if you do, but not in the waters of the truth of God! Do you need any nobler promise, any surer covenant? Wander through the deserts of salt till your skeleton lies bleaching there, for that will be your only reward if you turn away from the feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well-refined. As for me, I bless God that the righteousness of His testimonies is everlasting, and by them I mean to abide all my days, God helping me.

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