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The Nature Of Divine Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Extract from ["Discipleship in the School of Christ", Chapter 2.](#)

"I came that they might have life" (John 10:10).

When we come to the Gospel by John, we see that this is the Gospel of spiritual education. The others are largely a matter of history – the history of the earthly life, work, and teaching of the Lord Jesus, but the Gospel by John is the spiritual life and interpretation of Christ in Person.

Do you notice how the Gospel begins? It begins with these words: *"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4). The main part of the Gospel ends with these words: *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name"* (John 20:30-31). (Notice that chapter 21 is something added afterward – it is quite clear that John intended to finish with what is chapter 20, and he really finished with these words.)

The Gospel begins with: "In Him was life." It ends with: "That you may have life." The main Gospel comprises 20 chapters, and halfway through 20 is ten. In chapter 10, verse 10, we have *"I came that they might have life."*

The beginning: "In Him was *life*;" the middle: "I came that they might have *life*;" the end: "Believing, you may have *life*." In that one word "life" we have the full answer to our question: "Why did Jesus

Christ come into this world?"

Note one or two things: All the teaching and works of the Lord Jesus related to this thing that He called life. All His teaching and all His works were in relation to life.

The second thing to notice is this: Jesus demonstrated that to possess this life is a miracle, and He showed that it is impossible to have it without a miracle. To come to be possessed by this life is something supernatural.

The third thing we have to notice is: It is revealed by the Word of God that the possessing of this life is the basis of all God's works. He can do nothing in us until we have this life. He has to stand back and say: "I can do nothing until I have My life in you." His life in us is the basis of all His work.

So now we are going to look at this Gospel by John to instruct us in this matter of life.

Jesus' Teaching Of The Disciples

Notice again what it says in chapter 20: "*Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of His disciples.*" Note – "in the presence of His disciples." John said, in effect: "All these signs that Jesus did, He did in the presence of His disciples." That was because it was His disciples whom He was teaching. They were the ones who had to learn the meaning of these things because they had to carry on His work.

So we can take it that Jesus never performed a miracle unless His disciples were there. If there was some great work to be done, He looked round to see if the disciples were there. He was not just doing these things for the benefit of the multitude, though they may have had some benefit, as in the case of the feeding of the 5,000, but these things were for the education of the disciples.

Jesus was most careful that they came to understand the meaning of what He was doing. We are going to see how important that is.

I do hope that when I use that word "disciple" you are not thinking back 2,000 years! I think the majority of the people reading this, if not all, are disciples – those who are learning Christ. Just as the chief business of the disciples in those days was to learn Christ, so it is our chief business today. The most important thing for Christians is to learn Christ.

We turn once more to those two verses at the end of chapter 20, and I want you to underline three words. In "*Many other signs did Jesus*" underline the word "signs." In "*These are written that you may believe*" underline the word "believe." And in "*that believing you may have life in His name*" underline the word "life." *Signs – believe – life.* The whole of this Gospel is summed up in those three words, and we are going to look at them now.

The Purpose of "Signs" In Jesus' Ministry

Firstly: *signs.* The whole of the teaching of the Gospel by John is gathered around seven signs, and they were seven especially selected signs. John says: "Many *other* signs did Jesus do," and that if they were all written "*even the world itself would not contain the books*" (John 21:25). There must have been

many more signs, but John has selected seven and has gathered the whole of this matter of learning Christ into them.

There are four words used for "miracles" in the New Testament. In some places they are called "wonders," and that conveys the idea of something quite unusual, or extraordinary, a wonderful thing. In other places they are called "powers," which conveys the idea of spiritual, supernatural energy. In other places they are called "paradoxes," which, as you know, is a contradiction. They were called "paradoxes" because they were something which contradicted the natural order of things. But the fourth word for "miracles" is this one which John always chose and is his favourite word for them.

He always called them "signs," which meant that these works indicated something more than themselves. The work was not just something in itself: there was a meaning behind it. It signified something. There was the actual work, but it had a spiritual meaning and was a sign of something more. That is John's word for "miracle."

We leave that for the moment – we are going to take it up again.

The True Nature Of "Believing"

The second word: *believe*. This is the key word to the whole of the Gospel by John and occurs 98 times in it. Everything in this Gospel gathers around that word: "*That you may believe.*" But what does the word "believe" mean?

It means two things, which are in the word itself. It means an acknowledgement of the truth, that is, the reaction which says, "That is true," or "He is true," "I believe He is true." But it means more than that. The word in the Greek means: "Believing that it is true, you commit yourself to the one who says it."

John puts that in another way in one place: "*As many as received Him*" (John 1:12). That is only another way of saying "They committed themselves to Him." Believing is not only a mental thing. It is the committing of the life to the one whom you believe.

I once heard Dr. Billy Graham put it in a very simple way. I was sitting on the platform just behind him, and, as you know, he is quite a big man physically. He could put his weight on to the platform where he stood. He said: "Now, when I come on to this platform I do not stand on the steps and say: 'I wonder if the platform will hold me or whether, if I get on to it, it will collapse and let me down.' I have such confidence in this platform that I walk right on to it and commit myself to it. I have no question about the platform. I put my full weight on to it." He went on to say: "That is what the New Testament means by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ." "That *believing*" ... that is, committing yourself to the Lord Jesus.

The Blessing Of Divine Life

Now our third word: *life*. This brings us to the main object of our consideration. The signs were the instruments used by the Lord Jesus; the believing was the reaction of men to the signs, and the life was the result of their reaction. They committed themselves and they received life.

Let us look at this life. What is it? What is its nature and what does it mean? I do not think it is necessary to remind you that this is a kind of life that no one has who does not possess the Lord Jesus. The very word that is used for life here is different from other words for life. This is not animal or human life, but divine life, the life that is in God alone.

It is a life that is different from every other kind of life because it has a different nature in it. Every kind of life has its own nature, and divine life has divine nature in it. Peter speaks about being made "*partakers of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4), and with this life the very nature of God is implanted in us. It is a different nature from our own nature. We are going to see how that is.

But, remember – "*In Him was life*" (John 1:4). Is He different in nature from other men? Everyone can see that He is different from other men in His very nature, and the difference is made by this life that is in Him. This life brings with it a new and different consciousness.

Look at the Lord Jesus! What was His real consciousness? This was a thing about which He was always speaking, and it was so very evident in His case. He said, "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). "*I do always the things that are pleasing to Him [the Father]*" (John 8:29). "*The works that I do in my Father's name*" (John 10:25). Oh, this word "Father" in John's Gospel!

The consciousness of Jesus Christ every day was of His union with His Father, the oneness that existed between them: "*As you, Father, are in me, and I in you*" (John 17:21). The consciousness of the Lord Jesus was of the very closest union with God as His Father, and that was because the very life of God was in Him. His life was a God-conscious life; but God-consciousness in the sense of perfect oneness.

That is what it means to have this life. Man never had that. Jesus came to bring it in His own person – not to talk about union with God, but to live out a life of union with God and to bring His disciples into the same union. "*I came that they might have life*" – in other words, "I am come that they may have the same consciousness of God as Father that I have and that they may have the same divine nature in them as I have." (Not deity, but nature.)

Divine Life Must Grow

This life means another thing. Life must always *grow*. You know that very well! Whatever kind of life it is, if it is really life it must grow. You know that in your garden, and it is true in human beings. The law of life is constant development.

This was true of the Lord Jesus. It is said of Him that He was made "*perfect through sufferings*" (Hebrews 2:10) and that word "perfect" means "complete." He was made complete, full-grown, through sufferings. "*Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered*" (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus was growing by the power of this life in Him, and if we possess this life we should grow.

Paul says, "*That we may be no longer children ... but ... may grow up in all things*" (Ephesians 4:14-15). "*Till we all attain ... unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:13). So, to possess this life really means that we ought to be growing, and if we are not, there is something wrong with us.

Divine Life Is "Different"

Now notice these things: a different nature – a different consciousness – a different relationship – and a constant growth.

You see how these things are illustrated in this Gospel. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Let us think of Nicodemus as being a perfectly honest man. A great many things have been said about him which are not to his credit, but I believe that he was a very sincere man. He came and he called Jesus "Teacher." "*We know that you are a teacher come from God*" (John 3:2).

What did he come to Jesus about? Evidently he had come to talk about the Kingdom of God, because the Lord Jesus read his thoughts. He knew that Nicodemus was interested in the Kingdom of God, but He said to him, in other words: "You will never get into the Kingdom of God unless you have God's life. You and I cannot even talk about the Kingdom of God because we have not the same life. How do you get this life? You must be born again, and if you have never been born you are not alive."

So it is quite clear that Nicodemus had not the nature of the Kingdom of God, because he had not the life. For any of us to get into the Kingdom of God we have to receive the life of God, which is His very nature.

Then we said it is a different consciousness. How beautifully this is illustrated by the woman of Samaria! Poor woman, she wanted to know the secret of life. She had missed it, had tried to find it but had never done so. Hers was only a poor existence! Jesus began to speak to her about life and said, in effect: "The water that I give you will be living water in you, springing up into eternal life. When you have the life that I can give you, or that is in Me, then you will find the secret of life."

What about this matter of a new consciousness? A whole section of John's Gospel is taken up with this. On one side stands Jesus alone; on the other are the Jewish leaders. They are in two different worlds and do not understand one another – at least, the Jewish leaders do not understand Jesus. How different they are!

Jesus puts His finger upon the very point of the difference. He speaks of God as His Father. He says to them: "You just do not know the Father" "*You are of your father the devil*" (John 8:44). "I came from above; God is My Father." He had the consciousness of God as His Father, and they had no such consciousness. The reason was that they had not this life in them.

Then what about this matter of constant development? There is a very beautiful illustration of this in John's Gospel, in chapter 12, where Jesus says, "*Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abides by itself alone*"... *By itself alone ... "But if it dies, it bears much fruit"* (John 12:24). The new life that comes in resurrection means that that seed is multiplied a hundred-fold. There is no end to the development of it once resurrection life comes into it. There is constant development by the power of this new life, and that is a law of life.

Dear friends, all these things are meant to be true of you and of me, for this is what it means to have this new life. I trust that what we have been able to say makes very real this wonderful thing that Jesus Christ came into the world to give to us.

In his first letter, John said, "*He that has the Son has the life*" (1 John 5:12). If we have the Lord Jesus, then we have this life, and what this life is in all these respects is supposed to be true of us. That is the miracle of eternal life. May it be true of every one of us! We have the Son and we have the life; we know that we have the life and that, as we said, we are having it more abundantly, meaning that the life has to grow forever.