

Lambs Among Wolves

By

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Chapter 4

Are You Dead or Alive?

THE QUESTION posed in the chapter title may seem like a strange one unless it has been studied from the standpoint of God's Word. Many may be amazed to learn that millions who think they are very much alive are really dead. Let us go back to the record of creation and get a better understanding of what it means to be alive or dead.

"The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed." "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:8, 16, 17.

For a long time this text created a perplexing problem for me. Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of that forbidden tree, but they continued to live for hundreds of years. However, I found that the solution was simple when I studied other statements in the Bible. For example, 1 Timothy 5:6 states, "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Thus it is clear that the Bible makes a distinction between physical life and spiritual life.

God is the source of all life, and at creation He endowed all the creatures He had made with physical life. He then created Adam and Eve "in his own image," and He endowed men with intellectual and spiritual faculties which placed them on a plane far above all other living creatures on earth. They were created in His image—pure, holy, and endowed with eternal life; but it was theirs only as long as they were obedient and loyal to their Creator.

By way of illustration, imagine two invisible lines coming down from God to this world. One conveys physical or animal life to every living creature. Over the other lines comes spiritual or eternal life, which makes it possible for man to live a holy, happy life forever. But man is warned that if he chooses to disobey God, the spiritual lifeline will be instantly severed, and he will be dead spiritually, though alive physically. This is what occurred to Adam and Eve the moment they disobeyed God. They lived on physically, but were dead spiritually until God revealed His wonderful plan of salvation through the sacrifice of His beloved Son, who was to bear the death penalty to save man.

The Bible tells us plainly that "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Romans 5:12. The sentence of death was passed upon the human race when Adam and Eve sinned, but God had a plan by which every member of the race could have another chance. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Millions of human beings go about their activities day by day, physically alive the same as other animals, and not realizing that they are dead from the standpoint of eternal life. How shocking it is to think that probably the great majority of the people we meet on the street are dead! And it is sad indeed to think that this also may apply to many who regard themselves as Christians.

"I know your doings—you are supposed to be alive, but in reality you are dead. Rouse yourself and keep awake, and strengthen those things which remain but have well-nigh perished; for I have found no doings of yours free from imperfection in the sight of My God." Revelation 3:2, 3, Weymouth's Translation.

How important it is that we understand what really takes place when we are born again and become real children of God!

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Ephesians 2:1. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Romans 6:13.

We can hardly think of any miracle more amazing than to stand beside a casket containing the body of some loved one and see that person resurrected and filled with life and energy again. Should not our hearts be deeply stirred when we realize that we were dead spiritually and that because of His infinite love and mercy the almighty Life-giver has raised us from the dead, and we have eternal life? "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." Ephesians 2:4, 5.

It was because of His great love wherewith He loved us that He raised us from the dead. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Jeremiah 31:3.

Do You Know You Are Alive?

It is evident that many are not aware of the fact that they are dead. How could any intelligent being who has any true conception of the importance of eternal life be content with mere physical life? How earnestly we should seek to meet the conditions which our loving heavenly Father offers to raise us from the dead and give us eternal life!

"We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." 1 John 3:14. "As for us, we know that we have already passed out of death into Life—because we love our brother men." 1 John 3:14, Weymouth's Translation.

Here we have God's test by which we may determine whether we are dead or alive. And now we can understand the statement, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." She loves herself and lives to please and enjoy herself, thinking only of her own desires and pleasures—and she is dead spiritually. Jesus lived to bless others, and so do all whom He has raised from the dead.

Since this is the divinely given test which proves whether we are dead or alive, would it not be well to give earnest study to this matter of love for others? The Bible says, "He who is destitute of love continues dead." 1 John 3:14, Weymouth's Translation. We have already noticed how clearly the Bible teaches that "love is the fulfilling of the law"; therefore if we are saved from all our sins and are living victorious lives, it will be because we have been raised from the dead and God has shed abroad His love in our hearts. Then we shall love our fellow men as God loves us.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is *love*. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." 1 John 4:7-9.

Here again we notice that love is the test of the new birth, for when we are born of God, we inherit His divine nature; and since God is love, wherever His nature controls, love will reign. On the other hand, if love does not reign in our lives, it is proof that we have not been born again, proof that we do not know God, proof that we abide "in death."

Our Relation to God

It is in this epistle written by the "beloved disciple" that we have a wonderful revelation of the union and fellowship that is to exist between God and His earthly children. We are told that *God* is love. This would include the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three living persons in the heavenly trio. "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." 1 John 4:16.

It is a wonderful thing to experience genuine repentance for all our sins, to be born again, and to unite with the church. Then, as we follow on to know the Lord, we shall have an ever-increasing consciousness of our living union with God; we abide in Him, and He in us, and we are surrounded with His presence. How the aged disciple loved to dwell on this subject! "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." 1 John 4:12. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." 1 John 4:15.

The Effect of Love

As we study these precious truths, we are thrilled with the fact that love makes us perfectly obedient to the will of God. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." If we are controlled by His love, we shall avoid doing anything that would displease or grieve our heavenly Father or doing anything to wrong our fellow men. The Holy Spirit will abide in us; and "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

We are living in the last days of this world's history, the time when, we are told, "the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." We see on every hand the increasing results of his supernatural power, driving men to crime and warfare. We see calamities, accidents, and disasters on every hand. The Saviour, looking forward to this time, tells of the effect these conditions will have upon the people: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." Luke 21:26. And then we see how His great love makes provision for His children in this time of trouble: "Love has in it no element of fear; but perfect love drives away fear, because fear involves pain, and if a man gives way to fear, there is something imperfect in his love." 1 John 4:18, Weymouth's Translation.

This is not just a beautiful theory, but a wonderful experience to those who have claimed the promise by faith. I have been in heathen lands and with other missionaries have had savages, bandits, and fanatics blazing away at us with their guns. Despite the bullets flying around us, we felt no more fear than when we were resting in our homes. Why should we fear when we have the assurance of being surrounded with His almighty presence? In a raging storm on the ocean in a small boat, or in an airplane far up in the clouds in a storm, what could be more restful and comforting than the knowledge that we are sheltered in the hollow of His almighty hand?

We think of John as the great teacher of love, but the Apostle Paul also gives us most precious lessons on this subject. How much his earnest prayer should mean to every child of God!

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Ephesians 3:14-19.

How trifling and unimportant are all the ambitions and aspirations of the pleasure lover, the one who is dead to eternal things, in comparison with the ideals here set before us!

What Is Delaying the Coming of Jesus?

In His messages to the seven churches, which cover seven periods of time from the days of the apostle until the close of probation, the Lord in the Book of Revelation gives a special message to the remnant church. To several of the churches He gives solemn reproof and warnings because of heresy and false teaching. But there is no suggestion that the remnant church is teaching anything but the pure gospel of Christ. However, there is decided reproof because of the spiritual condition of its members. He says they are "lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot." They say they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, while they are actually wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and know it not. In His great love and mercy He points out the cause of their failure and tells them the remedy:

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent." Revelation 3:17-19.

In their sad and deplorable condition of spiritual poverty and wretchedness, the first and greatest need is for "gold," which means LOVE and FAITH. And so we are told that "lack of love and faith are the great sins of which God's people are now guilty."

In view of all this precious instruction the Lord has given us about the importance of love, and the fact that our lack of love is delaying His coming, how can we refrain from bowing humbly before our merciful heavenly Father and entreating Him to pour His own divine love into our poor, starved hearts? Let us not rest until it overflows in streams of living water to those about us who are still dead.

The Importance of Love

And now, before leaving this wonderful subject of love, which helps us to understand much more fully what it means to be alive and to be real Christians, let us notice how utterly worthless is a profession of Christianity if we are not filled with the love of God. We shall look at Paul's message, using Weymouth's Translation: "If I can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but am destitute of Love, I have but become a loud-sounding trumpet or a clanging cymbal." 1 Corinthians 13:1.

Think how thrilling it would be to be able to speak with the voice of an angel from heaven! All the education and training of the greatest worldly institutions would not enable us to do that. Yet without love all our beautiful oratory would be as worthless as a clanging cymbal. "If I possess the gift of prophecy and am versed in all mysteries and all knowledge, and have such absolute faith that I can remove mountains, but am destitute of love, I am nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:2.

Think what it would mean to possess the gift of prophecy and be able to foretell future events! And think what we could do if we understood *all* mysteries and *all* knowledge! These illustrations are evidently used to reveal to us the comparative worthlessness of the things men prize so highly, apart from love. And why should it not be so when we realize that "he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love"? 1 John 4:8. "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." 1 John 3:14. And now, after looking at the nothingness of life without love, we are shown the wonderful beauty and attractions of a life of love:

"Love is patient and kind. Love knows neither envy nor jealousy. Love is not forward and self-assertive, nor boastful and conceited. She does not behave herself unbecomingly, nor seeks to aggrandize herself, nor blaze out in passionate anger, nor brood over wrongs. She finds no pleasure in injustice done to others, but joyfully sides with the truth. She knows how to be silent. She is full of trust, full of hope, full of patient endurance. Love never fails." 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Weymouth's Translation.

Let us come back for a moment to that inspired statement of how we may know whether we are alive or dead: "As for us, we know that we have already passed out of death into Life—because we love our brother men. He who is destitute of love continues dead." 1 John 3:14, Weymouth's Translation.

Would we not be wise to ask ourselves the question, How concerned do I feel day by day as I meet precious souls for whom Christ gave His life, who are dead and do not realize it? We know the provision God has made to raise them to life--eternal life. We may think that they are not interested, but would it not be worthwhile to make an earnest effort to awaken their interest? We have read in the Word of God that if we do not love them, we are still dead. Are we not making a tragic mistake to assume that we have eternal life if the love of God does not fill our hearts and overflow in streams of living water as we seek to win lost souls to the Life-giver? "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35.