



Life and Death

Unto the angel [officer, pastor] of the church in Sardis write; . . . I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. – Rev. 3:1

Among the grimmest words in all the Bible are these of the risen Jesus to John on Patmos. A dead shepherd of the sheep! A dead watchman of the city! A dead teacher of the unlearned! A dead nurse of little children! A dead physician of souls! A dead ambassador of heaven! Dead! Moving about, but dead! Occupying an important place, and so excluding another who might fulfill its functions, but dead! Having the reputation of being alive, but dead! What could be sadder; what so ghastly?

But over against this spiritually dead preacher was Paul. He was alive – all alive; throbbing, pulsing, eager, and alert; full of divine, eternal life. The most conspicuous among all the wonderful traits of Paul was his robust, abounding spiritual life! "This is life eternal," said Jesus, "that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." If this is life, and life eternal, then Paul had it. "God is not in all his thoughts," wrote the Psalmist of the wicked. But God was in all Paul's thoughts. Paul knew God. "God, whose I am, and whom I serve," he said, on the deck of the doomed ship. Paul knew Jesus Christ, whom God had sent. Christ filled the whole heaven of his soul. Eleven times he mentioned Jesus Christ by name in the first chapter of Ephesians, and about every verse enshrines his Lord.

That is the greatest wonder of Paul's letters – they enshrine and enthrone Christ. Cut out the name of Jesus, and His titles and the pronouns referring to Him, and you would so mutilate every chapter and almost every verse in Paul's letters and leave them so mangled as to be wholly unintelligible. Christ was his meat, and Christ was his drink. He lived by Christ. He lived for Christ. He lived in Christ, and Christ lived in him. He lived Christ. Listen: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

John 17:3; Ps. 10:4; Acts 28:23; Gal. 2:21