

# Is It Possible To Have Life While Living?

by Ron R. Ritchie

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Herb Caen, the San Francisco Chronicle columnist, has made many people laugh over the years with his daily witticisms. A recent column was not meant to be funny, however. It was about the deaths of several of his friends. In it he expressed his frustration over the loss of one friend in particular whom he described as "Someone Special."

The column began with the usual one-liners: "People are dying now who have never died before," and so on. Then he went on to say that people who have lost loved ones were at a loss as to what happened to their friends after death. Had they just "passed away?" Had they "gone to their Maker?" Did they "go to a far, far better world?" Did they "cross the final frontier?" He then talked about visiting his "special friend," who was dying.

As he was leaving him for the last time their eyes met. His friend said, "You won't be mad at me, will you?" The man died that night and the columnist admitted that he has been mad at him ever since. He said he did not believe in what is commonly called "the hereafter." That sounds too much like a legal term, he said.

This columnist is like many of our own friends and acquaintances\_maybe even some of you here this morning\_who seem to be living a kind of life, but they're not really living in anything like the full sense of the word. They have a sense of frustration and confusion about death and dying. In one breath they're angry about death, especially when a close friend dies. In the next breath they try to laugh at it and pretend it doesn't exist. Many of you are not only confused about death, but you are not really living even in this life. You have no sense of joy, peace, fulfillment, wholeness, direction or purpose in your life. You're walking around apparently alive and kicking, but inside you're dead, wondering what life is all about.

This morning I want to address a question that many of you may have already asked yourselves: Is it possible to have life while living? The answer I propose, taken from the First Letter of the apostle Peter, is, "Yes! The prophets have spoken of Him" (1 Peter 1:10-11); and, "Yes! The apostles have spoken of Him" (1 Peter 1:12). Let me explain what I mean by my answer. Turn to I Peter, chapter 1, verses 10-11:

## 1. Yes! The prophets spoke of him 1:10-11

**As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.**

Writing from Rome in 64 A.D., Peter is reminding the Christians in Asia Minor of several things that have become theirs as a result of their salvation. "As to this salvation," he begins, "you understand that when you came to know Jesus Christ he gave you his life. He is the One who said, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' He is the One who said, 'I am the truth and the life.' He is the One of whom it was said, 'There is no other name in heaven or under heaven whereby a man or woman must be saved.' Jesus is the only Savior, the only God who can give life. You Christians have been given this life, life as life was meant to be lived, life in all of its fullness, joy and peace. You have been given an inward peace despite all of the political, social and personal suffering you are now experiencing because of your faith in Jesus Christ."

Secondly, Peter reminds them, "As to this salvation, you have been chosen by God before the foundation of the world; you have been set apart by the Holy Spirit to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior; and you have been cleansed from the guilt and the shame of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ."

Thirdly, the apostle says, "As to this salvation you should bless God, the Father of Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy and grace has caused you to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Fourthly, "As to this salvation, you are now gifted with Christ's spiritual presence and power which you can draw on at any time in order to cope with reality, while resting in a secure salvation."

Fifthly, "As to this salvation, realize that you will be faced with various trials which are designed by God to purify your faith, to mature you, to grow you up and to erase the mixed motives of your hearts. But while you are going through these trials you will inwardly experience peace, a living hope, security, and an inexpressible joy and love for your risen Lord. Realize also that your salvation includes a new body for you, so that you will be able to function in eternity with Jesus, whether at death, or if he returns before you die."

Sixthly, "As to this salvation, understand the preparation that went on behind the scenes of history to make your salvation possible. This truth will help you bear up in this time of suffering. Know that God's wonderful plan of redemption was not an afterthought, but a forethought in his mind. It was a plan that required his Son to come to earth as a human being and die for mankind so that men could be set free from the sin of Adam."

Verses 20 and 21 of this first chapter speak further of this truth:

**For [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.**

Christians are saved from a living death by their faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Their deadly life has been replaced by eternal life, abundant life, life right here and now; and that life is the very life of Jesus Christ. This is what Herb Caen is missing. He brings much humor and insight into our daily lives, but he hasn't even tasted real life, life as God intended it to be lived. When his special friends disappear from the scene he is without hope of ever seeing them again. But when the special friends of those who follow Jesus Christ depart their bodies and go to be with Christ we know we shall see them again. That is the hope that sustains and comforts Christians when they say, "We will meet again," to their dying loved ones.

Peter now gazes back into history and shares with the Christian community in Asia Minor how God used faithful prophets over hundreds of years so that those first century Christians could experience on a personal basis the salvation offered by him. What the prophets saw and understood dimly over all those years, Christians could now see and experience in the full light of revelation.

Who were these prophets? Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, God has had a way to make his plan of redemption clear to all. From every generation he has chosen godly men to carry his message of the good news of his love and blessings, as well as his warnings and judgment. These godly men were his prophets, preachers of righteousness in an unrighteous society, men of God moved by the Spirit of God within them to speak to their own times and to future times about people, times and events yet to come.

In this context, Peter is saying that prophets like Moses, David, Daniel, Amos, Jeremiah and Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the Christ who would come as Prophet, Priest, and King, the great Deliverer who would free man from his spiritual sickness of sin. This liberating Savior would begin his work with the nation Israel, but, from his vantage point, Peter knew that Israel had rejected their Messiah, so that these prophets were writing of the coming Messiah and his offer of salvation to the Gentiles. These prophets, however, realized that the identity of and the time when this Messiah would appear were unclear. They inquired, searched and explored to no avail. Finally, when Jesus did appear, he said to his apostles, ". . . many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear and did not hear it."

And what was the message that the Spirit-moved prophets of old brought to Peter's generation as well as our own? First, they prophesied of the "Grace to come. In this context, Peter is saying that the grace to come was synonymous for salvation to the Gentile nations--God's undeserved favor, where by his mercy he sent his Son

Jesus to the world to seek and to save those who were lost. And this favor was extended to the whole world: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11); bringing salvation to all who place their faith in Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

This was a mystery to the prophets. They didn't quite see all that as clearly as you and I see and experience it today. Paul said that this mystery had been revealed to him: ". . . my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow--heirs and fellow--members of the body, and fellow-- partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." In other words, Jews and Gentiles would become one in Christ. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul described this mystery as "Christ in you [Gentiles], the hope of glory."

A survey of the Old Testament will amaze you at the number of prophecies pointing to the coming Messiah who would open the door of salvation to the Gentiles. For example, 800 years before the birth of Christ, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God the Father, addressing

God the Son, said,

**"I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations." (Isaiah 42:6)**

Simeon, an old man who lived in Jerusalem in the days when Jesus was a baby, was told that he would not die until he saw God's Messiah. The Holy Spirit directed him to go to the temple at the same time Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus there for the purification rites. Simeon went there and took Jesus in his arms and said,

"My eyes have seen thy salvation,  
Which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
A light of revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Thy people, Israel."  
So that is the first thing foretold by the prophets: the prophecy of the grace to come.

The second thing they prophesied as about the sufferings of the promised Messiah. The leaders of the Jews could not understand the concept of a suffering Messiah, although Moses clearly taught, 2,000 years before the Messiah appeared, that he would suffer, and referred to him as "the Passover Lamb," "the Atoning Sacrifice," and "the Smitten Rock."

Isaiah, writing 800 years before the birth of the Messiah, said,

All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all  
to fall on him.  
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He did not open his mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter.

David, writing 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus, spoke of Christ's experience on the cross, of his cry of anguish, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" He foretold the mockery, the exhaustion, the thirst, the piercing of his side, the dividing of our Lord's garments. In Psalm 22 he prophesied, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the scene at the crucifixion:

A reproach of men, and despised by the people.  
All who see me sneer at me;  
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,

"Commit yourself to the Lord; Let Him deliver him;  
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."

Daniel, writing 600 years before the birth of Christ, foretold, through the Angel Gabriel of the suffering and death of the Messiah:

"Then after sixty two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing. . ."

This was the prediction of the coming of the Roman armies and the destruction of the temple, made 600 years before the events actually occurred.

Peter, following the crucifixion and the resurrection, spoke to the Jews in 33 A.D., and said,

"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled." (Acts 3:18)

So the prophets wrote about the grace that would come to the Gentiles (in this context, the Gentiles of Asia Minor, as well as all Gentiles in the age of the Spirit, from Pentecost until the Second Coming of Christ). Peter also says that the prophets prophesied about the fact that the Suffering Messiah would die for the sins of mankind. Then the apostle turns to his audience and says, "As Christ suffered, so you must suffer. This is all part of God's "real plan of redemption."

Now he is about to say that the prophets not only prophesied about the grace to come and of the Suffering Servant, but they also prophesied about the glories to follow. "If he was raised in glory, so will you be raised in glory," Peter is inferring. By the Spirit of God, the prophets understand the glory of God.

David wrote about this: "The Lord [God the Father] said to my Lord [Jesus, the resurrected Christ], 'Sit at my right hand] the position of power and authority] until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet' [the Second Coming of Christ for his own and for the judgment of the nations]." (Ps. 110:1) Jeremiah called the Messiah "the Branch of Righteousness"; Jonah called him "the Resurrection and the Life"; Haggai called him "the Desired One of the nations"; and Malachi called him the "Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings."

When Jesus rose from the dead he called his apostles aside and told them he would open their minds and they would see what the prophets had to say about God's plan of redemption, by offering life to all who would place their faith in him:

**"These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled . . . thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:44-46)**

Ever since the Day of Pentecost, just 10 days following these words of Jesus, God has been calling out from among all the nations a people for his namesake, men and women and children who would come to know him and thereby experience life for the first time: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Christianity isn't just a new idea in God's sight. In God's mind and heart, Christianity has been his plan before the foundation of the earth. It isn't some 20th century idea, a new cult on the scene. This is reality as God has given it to man. And it's the only reality; it's life while living.

A few weeks ago my wife and I had dinner with a young woman from our Careers class whom we had recently met. She is a very sincere and serious young woman who had expressed an interest in the things of Christ. We were on our way to a meeting of a group of people who were considering his claims, and we had just ordered our meal at the Fish market restaurant and had begun to talk. Before I knew what had happened, she had accepted Jesus Christ, right there in the restaurant! "But you're supposed to do that later, at the meeting!" I said. The following week she came to the meeting again and never stopped talking about her

new-found faith in Christ. She witnessed of her new life to a friend who was sitting across the room and she accepted Christ later that week. They were both at the second service this morning, and right now they are on their way to Half Moon Bay to be baptized later today.

Now that's life, a new life in Christ, and that's exactly how God planned it before the foundation of the world. Last night we had a whole series of phone calls from people in our neighborhood whom we never thought were even listening, all wanting to know the time of the Sunrise Service, the time of the services here at PBC, what time was the baptism, etc. Was that all we're doing? they asked. What's happening is that life begets life as Christ is made manifest in people's lives, as he has made you alive in him. That's the attraction for people who do not know Christ. You don't ask them to join anything, to give their money; you don't want anything from them except that they walk away from living death into life eternal.

Is it possible to have life while living? Peter answers with a resounding 'Yes!' The prophets spoke of him.

2. Yes! The apostles spoke of him 1:12

**It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were not serving themselves, but you [Gentiles], in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven\_ things into which angels long to look.**

For generation after generation, the prophets faithfully recorded their prophecies about the coming Messiah, but they didn't know who this Messiah would be, or when he would come to earth. Even the angels were looking intently to see if they could get a glimpse of the grace of God at work. But these people in Asia Minor to whom Peter is writing had already received that grace which the prophets would love to have seen and the angels to have understood. We too in our day have received that same grace: it is Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the words, "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you . . .", Peter is telling the suffering Christians to whom he is writing that all the while the prophets were writing about the grace of God, the suffering and the resurrection of the Messiah, that those things were not to come in their time. All this was pointing towards the Gentiles who were never a people, never a nation, who never had a covenant with God, and never had any hope, but now the floodgates of love and life in Christ were open to them.

". . . in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven." What were "these things" announced by the apostles? The resurrected Messiah told Peter and the other apostles to wait for the Person and power of the Holy Spirit (the same Spirit who worked within the prophets), who would come upon them on the Day of Pentecost. This Spirit would empower them to witness the good news that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior, and the Lifegiver.

On that Day of Pentecost, Peter, having received the Spirit, preached to thousands of people who had gathered to celebrate the feast in the temple area. Using texts from the Old Testament prophets Joel and David, Peter preached with great power and authority and announced to the people that they had crucified the Messiah, the Prince of Life himself. "Let the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified," Peter told the listening throngs. This Jesus was not just another prophet, another teacher, one who was taught during his silent years by some yogi in India. This Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, but they crucified him!

What would you have said if you had been there. listening to these words? The prophets had prophesied his coming for thousands of years and these people had crucified him! Acts 2 tells us what those who were listening to Peter said: ". . . pierced to the heart, they said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" In one word Peter showed them the way out of the darkness in which they lived: "Repent":

"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children; and for all who are far off [you and 1, the Gentiles], as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself."

Is it possible to have life while living? Yes! "As to this salvation," the good news was (and is) spoken by the prophets and the apostles. the good news that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Is it possible to have life while living? Yes! "As to this salvation," the good news is that "grace" (salvation) was offered to us! The good news is that Jesus, God's Son, came to earth to die for our sins, that God the Father raised him from the dead and declared him to be both Lord and Savior, and all who place their faith in him will receive from the only Giver of life eternal life, right now!

This new life in Christ can be yours if you will do the things Peter suggests. I'm going to ask you to do four things if you want to receive this life. I don't understand how, but I've been so changed by doing this, as have many of my friends. I ask you to trust God, by faith, that it's true. I'm not asking you to join anything. I'm simply asking you to experience life as God intended it to be lived, and that life is Jesus Christ. Pray this simple prayer like these first century people were directed to pray by Peter:

1) Repent of your sins. That is, repent of the sin of rejecting Jesus as God's Son, his Messiah, his Deliverer, his Savior; the sin of rejecting the truth that you need a Savior; the sin of rejecting the gift of salvation; the sin of rebelling against God by trying to live your life without Jesus. Tell God you are sorry for that, that you didn't understand his great work and plan of salvation.

2) Acknowledge your need of a Savior, One who could deliver you from the power of sin; One who could deliver you from a living death; One who would forgive all your sins, every one of them. even the ones you never told anyone about; one who will wash away the guilt and shame that comes with those sins.

3) Ask the resurrected Jesus Christ. the Savior, to come into your life as Lord, to save you and impart his life to you right now.

4) Thank Jesus for coming into your life and for giving you the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you have prayed that prayer in faith, you will now experience the life that only the resurrected Jesus Christ can give: it is the life of God, and it's yours, forever!

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