

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT LIFE, SICKNESS AND SUFFERING

(Taken and adapted from 'The Red Bits – A Study Guide' by Michael Button)

INTRODUCTION

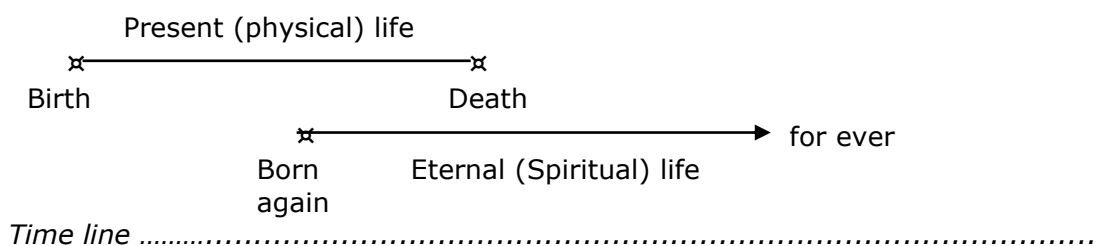
Ask a biologist what life is, and he or she will talk about cell replication, amino acids, DNA and the other science that make physical life possible. Ask a cynic, or someone who has tired of life, and you might be told, "Life is a jest" (John Gay, 1685-1732), "Life is an incurable disease" (Abraham Cowley 1618-1667) or "Life is but a walking shadow" (Macbeth, by William Shakespeare 1554-1616). These are a far cry from the view of the Apostle Paul who wrote, *For me to live is Christ.*¹ Having Christ in one's life makes all the difference, for He said, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."*²

In this and the next two Studies we shall look at what Jesus said about human life, what has gone wrong with it, and what He has done to restore what was lost.

A. ETERNAL LIFE

1. Eternal Life starts Now. When Jesus spoke of life, He had in view more than the day-to-day round of breathing, eating, working and relaxing, though an enhanced daily life maybe implied in the phrase *abundant life*. In warning against covetousness, Jesus said that *life is more than what we possess.*³ His story about Dives and Lazarus clearly spoke of a life beyond death (*read* Luke 16:19-21). Jesus saw life, not just as the period between birth and death, but as something that lasts forever – *Eternal Life*. We know that all physical life comes to an end, therefore the life that lasts forever must be spiritual; it is the spiritual life of the human soul that lives on when the physical body dies. Thus, to enter into eternal life, a new birth has to take place in which a believer is *born of the Spirit* by faith in Jesus (*read* John 3:5-6).

Such eternal life can (and must) be entered into now – in this life (*read the following verses* from the Gospel of John 3:36; 5:24; 6:40). This diagram illustrates the process:



¹ Phil 1:21.

² John 10:10.

³ Luke 12:15.

2. The Reciprocal Effect.

- (i) *The physical life affects the spiritual life* because what we decide and do now determines whether or not we enter into spiritual life, which lasts forever:

We must:

- (1) Repent, which means deciding to obey God rather than our sinful natures (*read* Mark 1:15).
- (2) Believe, which means putting one's faith in, or trusting, Jesus as saviour (*read* John 3:16).

Our future destiny is determined by these decisions and consequent actions. We shall look at this more closely in a future Study.

- (ii) *The spiritual life affects the physical life*. This is because it restores the fullness of life that was lost through sin, leading to death. A person who is made alive spiritually can, in the physical life

- Be complete. The New International Version translates John 10:10 as *life to the full*.
- See and enter the Kingdom of God (*read* John 3:1-5).
- Receive the Holy Spirit (*read* John 14:17).
- Be able to effectively worship God (*read* John 4:24).

Activity 1: Indicate which type of life Jesus is referring to in the following phrases from John 12:25 and Mark 8:35 – Mark 'P' for Physical Life or 'S' Spiritual Life.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| (a) John 12:25 <i>He who loves his life</i> | [] |
| (b) <i>will lose it,</i> | [] |
| (c) <i>and he who hates his life in this world</i> | [] |
| (d) <i>will keep it for eternal life.</i> | [] |
| (e) Mark 8:35 <i>For whoever desires to save his life</i> | [] |
| (f) <i>will lose it,</i> | [] |
| (g) <i>but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's</i> | [] |
| (h) <i>will save it.</i> | [] |

B. JESUS THE 'LIFE'

1. Jesus is the One who can give us that life.

- (i) He spoke of Himself as *The Life* (*read* John 11:25 and John 14:6).
- (ii) To receive that life we need an intimate relationship with Jesus, trusting in His sacrifice on the cross for our salvation. This is the meaning of Jesus' statement, which shocked many of His hearers who took Him literally, "*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.*"⁴

⁴ John 6:51-56.

2. Spiritual Life is maintained through unbroken union with Jesus. He illustrated this with the picture of branches attached to a vine, which receive their life from the sap only while they remain attached to the main plant. That same life-giving sap produces the fruit on the branches. In such a way, the fruit of Christian character and effective service in our lives depends on our remaining in union with Jesus (*read* John 15:4-5).

Activity 2: Abiding in Christ (John 15:4) is a spiritual experience but one that we can take practical steps to maintain and deepen. What are they? (You can pick up some clues from what Jesus went on to say in verses 7-9 of the same Chapter).

3. The spiritual life takes priority. If and when there is a conflict, the needs of the spiritual life must take precedence over the desires of the physical life (*read* Matt 16:26).

C. SICKNESS AND SUFFERING

Jesus did not say very much about sickness and suffering, but it is evident by the way He healed the sick and infirm wherever He went that He does not see suffering as part of God's will. Sickness, and suffering in general, came about as a result of the fall of mankind into sin (*read* Gen 3:16-19).

That some suffering may result directly from the sufferer's individual sin seems evident from the occasion when Jesus said to someone He healed, "*See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.*"⁵ However, not all sickness is attributed to the person's own sin, so we cannot presume that someone is personally to blame for their suffering. Jesus said of a man born blind that his condition was caused neither by his sin nor that of his parents.

Faith is a necessary prerequisite to healing. Where faith was lacking, Jesus was limited in what He could do by way of miracles, such as in His home district (*read* Matt 13:58). When Jesus was able to perform a miracle of healing, He often attributed the healing to a person's faith (*read* Luke 17:19). This need not be the faith of the person to be healed but could be that of others who had a concern for that person, such as with the friends of the paralytic who brought him to Jesus for healing, where we are told that Jesus healed him "*When He saw **their** faith.*"⁶

It should be noted that the expression *made whole*, which is often used in the New Testament for being healed, is the same word in the original Greek that is used for *salvation*. Healing is wholeness of the body, as salvation is wholeness of the soul.

Activity 3: Which one of the following is most likely to be correct?

- (a) Unless I have faith I cannot be healed.
- (b) Faith is all that is needed to be healed.
- (c) The presence of faith makes healing possible.
- (d) Faith is unnecessary if Jesus is present.

⁵ John 5:14.

⁶ Matt 9:2.