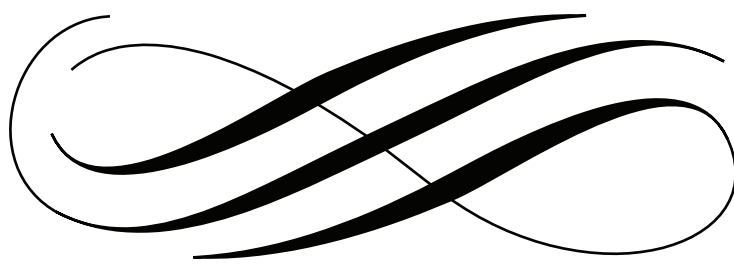


The
God of
Resurrection



Witness Lee

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Living Stream Ministry

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THE GOD OF RESURRECTION

We were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living. Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Cor. 1:8-9)

Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For our momentary lightness of affliction works out for us, more and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory. (4:16-17)

They disciplined for a few days as it seemed good to them; but He, for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness. (Heb. 12:10)

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. (Rom. 8:28-29)

God...who gives life to the dead. (4:17)

I am...the living One; and I became dead,
and behold, I am living forever and ever.

(Rev. 1:17-18)

Suffering is the lot of all the inhabitants of the earth. None can evade it. Some people imagine that if you believe on the Lord and live in His fear, you will be immune from all ills, yet numbers of Christians are grievously afflicted, and some who live in vital touch with God are in constant suffering.

The unsaved keep asking, "If God loves the world, why does He allow all this sorrow?" And the saved keep asking, "If God loves His children, why does He let so much trouble befall them?" Others go still further and inquire, "How does it come about that the more spiritual you become, the more hardship you meet?" These are practical questions, not mere theoretical quibbles, and we have to face them.

Why should man, who has been created by God, be subject to suffering throughout the whole course of his life? Why should men still continue to suffer after they become children of God? And why should men's sufferings increase with the increase of their devotion to God?

In my early days I spent a considerable amount of time looking into this problem of suffering, but because my knowledge of the Lord was superficial, I was only able to draw these conclusions from my studies: (1) Man is prone to error; therefore, suffering is necessary for his correction. (2) Suffering is needful if we are to comfort others, for only they who themselves have suffered can truly help other people. (3) The discipline of suffering is essential if we are to acquire endurance, for, as [Romans 5:3](#) says, “Tribulation produces endurance.” (4) Suffering is inevitable if we are to be molded into vessels that will be of use to God.

I admit that these four conclusions that I came to in my youth are all correct, but they come short of the mark. The ultimate object of all suffering is the accomplishment of God’s eternal purpose. That purpose has been revealed to us through the Scriptures, but it can be realized in us only through suffering. And its realization involves an experiential knowledge of God not only as the living God but also as the God of resurrection.

The experience of every saved person provides at least some evidence that God is the living God, but comparatively few of the saved realize

that the God who dwells within them is the God of resurrection. If the distinction between the living God and the God of resurrection is not clear to us, many problems will arise in our experience as we seek to press on. Let me explain this distinction quite simply.

The incarnation marked a mighty crisis in the universe. Prior to the incarnation, God was God, and man was man. There was no human element in God, nor was there any divine element in man. The two were quite separate. But one day “the Word became flesh,” and that day marked a turning point in the history of the universe. It brought one dispensation to an end and ushered in another. (Of course, we are talking from our human standpoint as creatures of time, not from God’s standpoint in a timeless eternity.)

With the incarnation a dispensation began in which God and man, man and God, were blended into one. The Scriptures declared that the Word that became flesh would be called “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” That name does not merely signify the presence of God in the midst of a multitude of men; it signifies His entry into humanity. What took place at Bethlehem was the birth of One who possessed a dual nature. God and man were united in that

one person. Up to that time all the descendants of Adam had possessed only one nature; after that time there was One who possessed two natures, the human and the divine. He was truly man, and He was truly God. That One, Jesus of Nazareth, who was both divine and human, became a source of perplexity to many people. They asked Him, “Who are You?” ([John 8:25](#)). And they asked one another, “What kind of man is this?” ([Matt. 8:27](#)). They recognized clearly that He was a man, yet because there was so much about Him that was divine, He was a problem to His contemporaries. “Immanuel”—God “manifested in the flesh” ([1 Tim. 3:16](#))—is the meaning of the incarnation.

But the incarnation is only one-half of the mystery. The other half is the resurrection. The incarnation is God coming into man; the resurrection is man coming into God. The incarnation brought divine content into human life; the resurrection brought human content into divine life. After the incarnation it was possible to say, “There is a man on earth in whose life there is a divine element.” But not until after the resurrection was it possible to say, “There is a God in heaven in whom there is a human element.” That is the meaning of the resurrection.

But why do we stress the distinction between the living God and the God of resurrection? It is because while the living God can perform many acts on man's behalf, the nature of the living God cannot blend with the nature of man. When, on the other hand, the God of resurrection works, His very nature is wrought into the nature of man. Brothers and sisters, please note carefully that even when the living God has performed some act on your behalf, after that act as before it, He is still He, and you are still you. His working on your behalf does not impart anything of His nature into you. The living God can work on behalf of man, but the nature of the living God cannot unite with the nature of man. On the other hand, when the God of resurrection works, He communicates Himself to man by that which He does for him. Let me cite two illustrations.

When the children of Israel were in a hopeless plight, the living God opened a way for them across the Red Sea. The dividing of the Red Sea was a miracle that demonstrated to them that God was the living God, yet that miracle performed for them did not bring any measure of the life of God into them. They witnessed many other divine acts in the wilderness—for example, God gave them bread from heaven and water out of

the rock—but despite those and other wonders performed by God for them, nothing of God Himself was thereby imparted into them.

In contrast to this, the apostle Paul testifies to knowing not only the living God but also the God of resurrection. Paul was so sorely tried that he despaired even of living, but it was thus that he learned to trust in the God who raises the dead. When the God of resurrection acted on his behalf to raise him from the dead, that divine act not only accomplished something for Paul; it also communicated God's own nature to Paul.

Brothers and sisters, do discriminate here. The miracles wrought for Israel in the wilderness were acts of the living God; however, despite the many miracles wrought for them, nothing of God was wrought into their constitution. The miracles wrought for Paul were wrought by the God of resurrection, and each fresh miracle wrought a fresh measure of God Himself into the life of Paul. Alas! Though generations have passed since the resurrection, many Christians are almost ignorant of the God of resurrection and are interested only in the living God. Let me try and bring this matter home to our daily life.

A brother becomes seriously ill. His case is considered hopeless, but God has mercy on him

and works a miracle on his behalf so that he recovers. Thereafter, he testifies to the fact that God is the living God. Yet within a short time of his recovery, he plunges right into the world. Even when he is living in the world, he still remembers that God is the living God and that God preserved his life from death. But he has experienced no increase of divine life; he has experienced only a miracle of healing.

Another brother becomes ill. Day after day passes without a vestige of improvement. For a long time he keeps hovering at the edge of the grave. Then, when he has completely despaired of living, in the depths of his being he gradually becomes aware of God. Resurrection life begins to work within, and he awakens to the fact that this resurrection life is a life that can overcome all affliction and can even swallow up death. He is still conscious of much weakness and is sorely tested; nevertheless, the realization deepens that God is not working to make His might known in external acts but is working to impart Himself. Light breaks upon him gradually, and gradually health returns. This brother does not just experience a healing; he comes into a new experience of God. The first brother could testify to a miracle wrought in his body and, shortly after, could

plunge right into the world. However, if this second brother gives a word of testimony, there is nothing sensational about it, and there is no stress on the healing, yet you meet God in his life.

Let me tell a story to illustrate this further. A brother who was engaged in an export business had arranged to send a consignment of goods by a certain ship. Somehow the goods were delayed and were forwarded by a later ship. Shortly afterward, he learned that the boat by which he had originally planned to send the goods had been sunk. How he praised God for His overruling grace! “O God,” he said, “how perfect Your guidance was! You are indeed the true and living God.”

Some time later, this same brother contracted tuberculosis, and to complicate matters, he developed digestive trouble as well. The tuberculosis called for a nourishing diet, but the digestive complaint forbade it. He was in a sore plight, but his wife comforted him and said, “Don’t you remember the episode of two months ago when God saved that consignment of goods? Oh, our God is the true and living God!” But on this occasion God seemed neither true nor living, for the more that the couple prayed, the more the brother hemorrhaged; the more they prayed, the

worse his digestive complaint became. He was perplexed. Finally, he gave way to doubt, and his wife began to question too. A few months later, his business came to a standstill. His health steadily deteriorated, and his financial resources steadily dwindled until both he and his wife reached the verge of despair. In their extremity they rallied all their unified faith and prayed once again, "O God, You are the living God. We believe that You will yet be gracious to us." But the next day the patient had a further hemorrhage, and neither he nor his wife could exercise faith anymore. The living God vanished from their horizon. Friends and neighbors pronounced the brother's case to be hopeless, and the doctor's verdict confirmed theirs.

However, that was not the end of the story. A crisis took place in the inner life of that brother. It began to dawn upon him (although he could not then define it as we are defining it now) that while he knew God as the living God, he did not know Him as the God of resurrection. He knew the doctrine of resurrection, but he did not know the reality of resurrection. He knew in experience that God had come into his life, but he did not know in experience that he had come into the life of God. It became clear to him that, from

his conversion right up to that time, he possessed the life of God, but he had not been living in the life of God. Even while he had been praying to God, he had been living in independence of Him. He saw that even his faith in God had been his faith, and his reliance upon God had been his reliance. He saw all his efforts to please God as something apart from God. He was filled with remorse. He abhorred himself. His healing ceased to be a question. His circumstances ceased to be a question. His one question was himself. He became overwhelmingly aware that what he had regarded as his most spiritual service had been something apart from the divine life. No one preached to him, but the Holy Spirit gave him a deep registration of his individualism. He judged himself unsparingly and ceased to entertain any thought of improvement in health or circumstances. At that point a strange thing happened—his health began to improve. No one knew when or how the healing took place. There was just a gradual increase of strength until he was quite well. At an earlier date he could bear witness to God as the living God but all the while he living his life in independence of God; from that date he knew the God of resurrection and began to live in dependence on resurrection life.

Brothers and sisters, do remember that God allows us to go through all sorts of distresses for the very reason that we may know Him as the God of resurrection. He constantly leads us into “death” situations because only in death can we experience resurrection life.

The Bible speaks of two creations, the old and the new. The divine nature does not indwell the old creation, and that is why it has become old. Where God is, there is always newness. The Jerusalem above is called New Jerusalem because it is full of God. The first creation, even though it is the creation of the living God, has no divine content, but what the God of resurrection raises from the dead has a divine as well as a human content. The new creation combines created and uncreated life. The first creation, though brought into being by God Himself, is allowed by God Himself to pass into death so that it may emerge in resurrection as a creation of dual nature, that is, combining the natures of God and man.

This principle has to be applied to us personally and to all our relationships. It is possible for fellow workers, who love one another and work together harmoniously, to imagine that their mutual love and their cooperation are a spiritual thing, and others too may regard this relationship

as such. Yet it may simply be a human relationship without any divine content. But one day the hand of God falls upon it, and the cooperation comes to an end. For some indefinable reason those fellow workers can no longer get on together. They are distressed about it and pray and yearn for a restoration of their former harmony, but the more they pray, the more it evades them. Then one day, when they have really died to their old experience, they find themselves in a new relation—not just a oneness of human nature but a oneness that is both human and divine.

Though the old creation has come into being by the mighty hand of the living God, He Himself does not reside within it. It is created by Him, and it displays His might, but it does not display His presence. How can the old creation be transformed into the new? It is by the incoming of God. But how can His incoming be secured? This is the point at which a major difficulty arises. The old nature must be shattered to make way for Him. Brothers and sisters, everything in your life must pass the supreme test of death in order to make a way for the God of resurrection. If you only know the living God, your knowledge will be too objective. God will be God; you will be you. You need to know the God of resurrection,

and it is only through death that He can cleave a way for Himself into your life.

Prior to my coming here, I visited a large textile factory in Manila. There I watched a process whereby certain materials were produced. But after the perfect fabric had been created, I saw a second process take place. That perfect fabric was plunged into a bath of dye where it lost all its beauty. It was a sorry sight. However, it was in that state that the dye permeated the fabric, and a new element was added to it. So it is with the old creation. It must pass through a devastating process if it is to be permeated by the presence of God.

I was deeply impressed as I stood in that factory watching the two processes and comparing the fabrics that emerged from the first and the second. They were not actually different fabrics, but some of them, passing through a state that temporarily destroyed their loveliness, had a new and permanent beauty imparted to them.

What is the significance of suffering? It is this, that the devastation it brings to the old creation provides an opportunity for the God of resurrection to impart Himself into His creatures so that they emerge from the death process with a divine element in their constitution. The

primary purpose of suffering in this universe, particularly as it relates to the children of God, is that through it the very nature of God may be wrought into the nature of man. “Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). Through a process of outward decay, an inward process is taking place that is adding a new constituent to our lives.

Beloved brothers and sisters, through hardship and pressure a divine element is being wrought into the very fabric of our being so that we cease to be colorless Christians but instead have a heavenly hue imparted into our life that was lacking before. Whatever else suffering may effect in this universe is incidental; this is primary—to bring those whom the living God has made possessors of created life into the uncreated life of the God of resurrection. It is in the death experiences, which come through suffering, that the life of the creature is blended with the life of the Creator. We may know the living God without such drastic experiences, but only through death can we come to an experiential knowledge of the God of resurrection.

Suffering is the God-appointed lot of the Christian. The Christian’s happiness is not to be

found in external things but in learning to enjoy God Himself in the midst of trial. Paul and Silas could rejoice and sing His praises while they were in prison because their happiness did not come from outer circumstances but from an inner enjoyment of God ([Acts 16:22-25](#)). In Paul's short letter to the Philippians, written during his imprisonment, there are over a score of references to joy. In deep distress he could still be joyful because in his affliction he was learning to know Christ, to appropriate Him, and to enjoy Him. Paul's outward circumstances were all conducive to sorrow, but it was in sorrow that Christ was imparted to him as the source of his joy.

Beloved brothers and sisters, do you want to be partakers of the new creation? Do you want to know perennial newness? Then you must give your consent to God when He seeks to lead you through devastating processes. And you need have no fear, for God knows how to apportion suffering. He is an expert at matching our suffering to our state. He measures all things with unfailing accuracy and selects the particular trial suited to the particular need. He invariably chooses the lot of each one with this goal in view—an increase of the divine content in our

life. If He chastises us, it is always “what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness” (Heb. 12:10). “All things work together for good to those...who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). What good? It is this, that we may be “conformed to the image of His Son” (v. 29).

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