

Our Extremity is God's Opportunity

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In 2 Corinthians 4: 6 we have life coming into death, the almighty power of God speaking *light*, where there was *darkness*; bringing in *life*, where there was *death*. In Ephesians 2 we have the state and circumstances of those to whom He gave life. We find there the entire absence of anything good in the creature. We see in verses 1-3 the pit from whence they were digged and who is the master of it; and then is brought out (v. 4) the motive of the divine mind — "rich in mercy." It is an old thought that if we look at the origin and close of anything we shall form a correct judgment of it. Look at this pit, and then the finish of this perfect work, when the Lord appears on the cloud, what does it show? All *weakness* in the creature, all *power* in Him.

Paul had been looked into by the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, he had given up all his plans, *he had got a new master*, he was a new man. But some time or other he had to go through the process of learning what the entire *impotency* of the earthen vessel is, when any claims are put upon it. We learn grace, but we have to learn too what the earthen vessel is — that "in *me dwelleth no good thing*." The soul gets a sense of its *total incompetency*. We must and can only get at what is right through *death and resurrection*. *Faith* must be in exercise; but often when we ask for faith, instead of the rest and quiet we expect, waves and billows arise. The wave of death rolls in, which bring us to our wits' end. Christ works all our works in us. We feel we ought to be this or that, but where is the power? He that plants the seed in us breaks up little bits of the rock that the water may make it bud, and that the seed may grow up. Are we struggling against lusts, etc., and forgetting that it is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit?" We do not realise enough that everything is secured for us up there. Some who know how to sing the song of redemption, in the wilderness, have yet to learn their connection with the perfect power of Him who is risen from the dead, and have, as to themselves, to go on in the sense of cripplement and perfect weakness. I could not ask the Lord to take the law of sin and death *out* of me. The light shined into Saul's heart, it did not take anything *out* of him; but it enabled him to be master of all his lusts and passions. He had to learn that he was but an earthen vessel.

God is the God of resurrection. God's way of dealing with His people is the display of His strength in their weakness. *You need not be afraid of being brought to death if He is the God of resurrection*. Have you the sentence of death in yourself? It is a thing of everyday wear; *a Christian man should never take a step but on the principle of having the sentence of death in himself*. God often brings us up to the last point, to see if we have the sentence of death in ourselves. If He lets us down into a pit where there is no water, there is light above! "Who hath delivered and doth deliver," etc. (2 Cor. 1-10). Past, present, and future, all is connected with Him, as the God of resurrection. If we want to know Him as the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," we must be prepared to be put into circumstances to experience our need of mercy. *Mercies* are the forms in which the *mercy* which dwells in the heart of God expresses itself. The Corinthians did not think they needed much comfort, but Paul, who had to run the world round, and who carried the churches in his bosom, found out *his* need of mercy and comfort. Paul was kept from glorying in gifts, for God rolled in upon him the sentence of death every day; so while the Corinthians were boasting their gifts, God was letting Paul down into all sorts of extremities, that the rain of His mercies might flow in. In 2 Corinthians 1 we get the word "comfort" ten times. We shall get lots to bring us into the want of this comfort. It *must* be so, if we have much to do with Himself. *Every step of the wilderness must have the principle of death and resurrection*. The servant of the Lord who has known Him longest, I would ask him, Which are the times which look brightest *now* ? Is it not when you have been brought to your wits' end, and perhaps

had little faith, and were almost in despair, when you did not know how the truth or yourselves were to be brought out of it? Then, your extremity has been God's opportunity to show Himself the God of resurrection. John never gets his cup so turned upside down as to his service as when he found himself in Patmos. He was brought there that a book might be written, without which the Church could not well get to the end: there was the power of God blending itself with weakness. When Israel went out of Egypt God could have led them any other way; but He had prepared the wilderness for them, to teach them that He was the God of resurrection. He knows how to turn the wilderness into a standing water. People say, "Oh, my weakness! my leanness!" But we never should talk of weakness if it were a realised thing, a recognised thing. Sometimes we come and expect rest, and we find disquiet, because He wants to make His strength perfect in our weakness. Do you give thanks for the discovery of weakness? Directly we give thanks for a thing that is trying to us, Satan is worsted; he says, that will not serve me. If in a burning fever and you cannot sleep, and you give thanks, he will send you to sleep directly rather than be the cause of your giving thanks. There is sweetness in the very thing, because God is letting in His strength.

Where are the saints who, with outstretched necks, are saying, "Come, Lord Jesus"? Where are those from whom the testimony is going out? Who are tapping at every door and heart and saying, There is mercy in God's heart for you? You are wanted to display His mercy. God prepares the place beforehand for us. His purpose is that the principle of death and resurrection should be spread over our whole course, from the Red Sea till we enter the Rest.