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RISEN WITH CHRIST

By Paul S. Rees, D. D.

Text: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." John 5:25.

Addressed to the Dead, the Voice of our text is Accented with Deity. Whose voice is it that speaks new life? "The hour cometh when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God." Ah, that is a glorious word! A voice sounds, and it is such a voice that the very vitality of God starts flowing within the soul. Self-centeredness becomes Christ-centeredness. Aimlessness turns to purposelessness. Formality is shot through with reality. The ill-smelling tomb of our old habits, our all too numerous sins, is broken open, and a new life is born.

The dead shall hear a voice! It is no new thing. History is rich with instances in which the hearing of a voice has been the turning point in the life of a soul. Moses heard a voice in the desert, speaking from a flaming bush. He was never the same again. The child Samuel heard a voice, and it set him on the high road to being a prophet of God. Elijah heard a voice, a "still, small voice," but it meant more to him than earthquake, wind or fire. Saul of Tarsus heard a voice and that dusty Damascus pathway became Glory Road both for himself and for the rest of the world. Martin Luther heard a voice, a voice that smote upon him like the keen, clear notes of a bugle, "The just shall live by faith," and Luther, the man of fear and doubt, became the man of trust and courage. Stephen Grellett, a brilliant, restless, unbelieving Frenchman, heard a voice. It came to him as he was walking along the bank of the quiet Susquehanna River, when he was the guest of a wealthy old Quaker. The voice spoke but one word again and again. The result was the conversion of one of the least known but one of the most remarkable missionaries of modern times.

But, mark you, it is the voice of the Son of God that speaks this new life. The one thing that man, with all his amazing achievements, has not been able to do is to create life. He has never been able to create physical life. And even though he should succeed in this, it still would be a far cry to the generation of spiritual life. Get hold of this fact, and it will help you to see why we must have the voice that carries the accent of deity if we are to be made alive in God. God's life of love and righteousness and mercy and truth, must be God's gift. His Word must speak it, else it will never come.

The voice of science has its fascination for us modern folks, but it cannot give us life.

The voice of ethics is a beautiful thing, but all its pictures and ideals of the good life fall flat upon dead souls. The voice of the state sounds pompously and powerfully, calling men to order and to peace, but its failure to solve our ills rings above the siren of the squad car and the thunderous drone of the dive bomber. The voice of the church is worth hearing, calling men to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, but even the church, as an institution, is unable to perform the needed miracle in the valley of dry bones, especially when those dry bones are her own! Someone has pointed out that when Peter and John were confronted with the impotent man at the gate of the temple, they did not say, "In the name of the Church rise up and walk." No, not even the Church can save us. Our hope lies in the summons which Peter actually gave to the helpless man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

Addressed to the Dead, Accented with Deity, the Voice of our text Arouses to Newness of Life. They that hear shall live!

Exactly how he will speak to you, or what he will say, I do not know. The one thing of which I am sure is: you will have a resurrection in your soul. You will be made alive to God and to the bright wonders of his grace. How variously, and yet how triumphantly Jesus spoke to men in the days of his flesh! In tones that dripped with mercy he said to one, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." With words of exquisite compassion he spoke to another, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." To a churchman he said, with searching authority: "Ye must be born again." To all the weary, sad-hearted and sad-eyed people who thronged about him he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

With whatever voice he speaks, whether commanding and challenging or tender and appealing, it is new life that leaps up within us. A high school girl listened recently as I spoke the saving word of Christ in a little group meeting, and half an hour later she was kneeling in the study, pouring out her heart's yearning into the ears of an understanding Saviour. Was she unhappy? Yes, wretchedly so. Was her personal world all topsy turvy and in well-nigh hopeless confusion? Yes, terribly so. Had temptation beaten her down and pulled some of her fairest ideals down with it? Yes, and the regret of it all was an unbearable load upon her conscience.

Her prayer was frank and earnest, mingled with honest tears. "O Jesus, I can't go on like this. Thou knowest I have gone with a cheap crowd and have done cheap things—and I don't want to be cheap. Forgive me and help me to live as a Christian. She took Christ's forgive-

ness. More, she took Christ Himself. Ten days later, when I saw her, I recognized the light of a new life in her eyes. When I asked her how it was with her, she said, "Oh, I have had a wonderful week." What made the difference? She had heard the Voice of the Son of God, Who smites death with resurrection and makes all things new!

Consider carefully how this Voice must be Acknowledged if its Word is to be Fulfilled. "And they that hear shall live." Will you listen to Christ? That question is crucial. Preparing the way for the utterance that forms our text, Jesus had said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."

Now, will you take Christ at his word on that? Will you catch the meaning of this further thing that he says: "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." Christ as Teacher cannot save you into newness of life, nor Christ as miracle worker, nor Christ as example. But Christ as the crucified, resurrected, death-conquering Son of God can save you. How, you ask? Read it again: "The Son hath life in himself. How will he cause you to rise out of the grave of your dead and defeated past? Why, by imparting himself to you, by taking possession of your very being, by permeating your whole personality with his healing, life-giving presence. "Christ in you!" cried Paul, that is the hope of glory!" If Einstein were in you, it would mean science. If Churchill were in you, it would mean oratory. If Tennyson were in you, it would mean poetry. If Mozart were in you, it would mean music. And if Christ were in you, it would mean life—God's kind of life, life that is free of its guilt, rid of self-centeredness, abounding in its possibilities—life here and life forever more.

You can't have an indwelling Einstein or Churchill, or Tennyson or Mozart. But you can have an indwelling Christ. Moreover, you can have him now. "The hour is coming," says the text. That is hopeful. "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God." "Now is!" "Now is the accepted time." "Today is the day of salvation."

"O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel;
For some are sick and some are sad,
And some have never loved Thee well,
And some have lost the love they had.

Thy touch has still its ancient power;
No word from Thee can fruitless fall;
Hear, in this solemn evening hour,
And in Thy mercy heal us all."