God Raises Dead Dreams

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Pre Scripture Remarks

Scripture uses death to identify man's greatest enemy, and there's nothing that man fears more. When a person expires—losing all vital signs—doctors, medicine, and science are powerless in its presence. Only God can raise the dead. But this message doesn't deal with the physical cessation of life; it deals with the death of a different nature. I'm speaking of the death of God's divinely inspired promises and visions that He's given to you.

I'm persuaded that many Christians are in the gestation stage of specific promises God has given them. Perhaps years ago, he planted a dream within you, but you're still awaiting its fruition. You might have even entertained thoughts that your promises are dead. But the God who resurrected his promise to Abraham, at age ninety-nine, can resurrect your promise.

It sounds contrary to divine wisdom, but this is often God's agenda for fulfilling His Word: He births a promise within your spirit; incubates it through your prayer and faith for a month, year, decade, or longer; allows it to die and wraps it in grave clothes, and then makes it seem forever unsalvageable. But that's exactly how God wants it! He wants your utter dependence on Him—the God who raises dead dreams and promises. And that's the testimony of Paul in 2 Corinthians. Let's read our text:

2 Corinthians 1:8–11

Paul uses an interesting phrase in our text. He says: *"In our hearts we felt the sentence of death."* When you investigate the drama of Paul's life, you'll find numerous occasions on which he flirted with death. In Romans 8:36, he said: *"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

In essence, Christians bear a death sentence wherever we go. Paul said that at any point, we should be ready to surrender our lives for Christ. And the reason Christians shouldn't shrink from death is that we know the grave isn't the end. Christ's resurrection and His promise of Heaven is our destination!

I want you notice something about Jesus. I'd like you recall how Christ demonstrated His mastery of life at every point:

> He modeled righteousness, love, faith, goodness, trust, and every other virtue pertaining to godliness.
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> He taught right relationships with God and our fellow man.
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> He knew the agony of submitting His will to the Father.
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> He knew how to correct an erring friend without disowning them.
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> He was the perfect example in life and the perfect example in death.
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> And He never hesitated in marching toward the cross. He was keenly aware that His redemptive mission meant crucifixion. He was born to die, and He knew it.

There's a recurring phrase John uses. It's a phrase reading, *"My hour,"* or, *"the hour."* Every time it's recorded it refers to the hour of Christ's crucifixion. Notice the frequency of this phrase.

> It first appears in John 2 at the marriage of Cana when Mary urged Jesus to supply more wine. Jesus responded: *"Woman, **my hour** has not yet come."*
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> In chapters 7 and 8 the Jews attempts to apprehend Him were foiled because: ***"His hour** had not come."*
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> In John 12, just days before His decease, He said: ***"The hour** has come for the Son of Man to be glorified . . . now my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from **this hour**?" But for this purpose I came to **this hour** . . . Father, glorify your name"* (23, 27, 28).
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> In John 13, at the Last Supper, Jesus was described as *"knowing that **His hour** had come"* (13:1).
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> In John 16:32 he warned His disciples: *"Behold, **an hour** is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave me alone"*

> And then in John 17 He prays the stirring prayer that opens with the words: "*Father, **my hour** has come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify You"* (17:1).

Jesus realized His earthly mission involved the cross. That's because redemption is vitally linked to death. The only way to reap a harvest is through death. Listen to Christ's words in John 12:24: *"Truly, truly I say unto you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*

Immediately after Jesus died the apostles assumed the kingdom of God wouldn't be realized through Christ. But Jesus knew He was seeding a death that would produce a world-wide harvest. And it has! Today, roughly 500 million people claim Christ as Savior.

(Application) Let's personalize the application because nearly everyone here holds to God-given promises or plans. Some here feel your promises are dead. At best, they are on the respirator. But maybe God wants them crucified and buried. If so, let them die. "*Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."*

When everything around looks grim, and promises are buried, that's the time to rejoice! And it's because a resurrection is coming! A miracle is inevitable! You see, God doesn't tease you with His promises to create disappointment. Divine delays, disappointments, and even death are all part of the process:

> God produces extremity to reveal His ability.
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> He leads into the wilderness, marches us against Jericho's walls, throws us in the fire, and sends us to the lions to keep our faith focused in Him.
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> Then, when we're utterly dependent on Him, He looks into our valley of dead, dry bones and starts the miracle. He shakes, reassembles, restores, breathes life, and then says: "Let's have a resurrection service. Dead dreams stand up, dry promises come alive." And the miracle transcends your expectations.
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> He writes the *"sentence of death"* on your promises so your only alternative is to trust *"God, Who Raises The Dead."*

How often have you confronted the brink of despair only to find that's when God arrived? Death always precedes a resurrection!

(Illustration) Sometime back, I read a story that would have easily made the pages of Holy Scripture had it happened in Bible days. In commenting on the story, Paul Harvey said: "It was either the most phenomenal coincidence that ever occurred, or it was an act of God." It happened in Swan Quarter, N.C., in 1876. A group of Methodists had a dream of building a Church. The town was situated in a valley, so securing an elevated lot was necessary. The Church approached a prosperous land-owner about property two blocks from downtown, but he wouldn't sell. They were disappointed but settled for acreage on Oyster Creek Road, and on September 16, 1876, the building was dedicated. Three days later, a torrential storm deluged Swan Quarters, ripping off roofs, destroying houses, and uprooting trees. On the second day of the storm, the townspeople witnessed a drama of Biblical proportions. The entire structure and foundation of their Methodist Church were floating down Oyster Creek Road. Men of all faiths rallied and waded into waist-deep water, tying ropes to the building in an effort to control it—but to no avail. The building drifted to the center of town and, as numbers watched, took a sudden turn and moved two blocks. It then veered off that road and settled into the middle of the area's prime property. Yes, the very property the landowner refused to sell. The following day, when the proprietor discovered what happened, he donated the real estate deed to the Church.

Granted, occurrences like this aren't commonplace. But God birthed a dream within an entire congregation that I'll call "Plan A" and then dissolved it! Soon afterward, he brought a devastating storm to wash away "Plan B"; and then, he resurrected everything they wanted and more with "Plan A"! Praise God!

(Transition) As we continue examining this subject, consider Abraham's experience of death and resurrection. As the Father of our faith, he represents much of what Christians experience.

Abraham's Obedience

Genesis 12:1 says: *"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. (2) I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (3) I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Abraham was seventy-five when he entered into this covenant with God. He was living with his relatives in Haran and was probably content with the verdant Mediterranean surroundings. Haran was a beautiful riverside trade center. Not many seventy-five-year-olds are transient-minded. Despite Abraham's contentment, God told him to relocate. And without hesitation, Hebrews 11:8 says, *"he went out, not knowing where he was going."* That's faith. Unlike some Pentecostals, Abraham didn't need three prophetic confirmations and a vision to stimulate obedience; he responded to God's voice.

He didn't whine about the sacrifices, he responded. Genesis 12:4 says, *"So Abraham left"* (NIV). The KJV says, *"So Abraham departed."* The NASB says, *"Abraham went forth."* When God spoke, He didn't argue or play "Let's Make a Deal," he believed God and departed! And that should be our reaction when God speaks: *Take Abraham's faith and depart.* Don't be afraid to make the sacrifice God requests. Blessing always follows the sacrifice!

I've never been acquainted with a sacrifice God requested that outweighed His reward. God told Abraham to sacrifice three things: His father's house, his relatives, and his country. That's quite a sacrifice. But look at the promise. In Genesis 12:2–3 God said His blessing would overtake Abraham through his family, the nation, and even the world. What a trade-off!

Listen, God's covenant blessings surpass anything this world can offer. Don't look back when you start out with God. Jesus said, *"He who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not worthy of me."* If the Lord is saying, "Forget the former things and don't dwell on the sacrifice. Then *trust in the Lord with all your heart and He will direct your paths."* Like Philippians 1 says: *"Forget the things of the past and press toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

(Transition) Don't think obediently following God liberates you from tests. Some people have a misconception of the "faith life." They think it's an exemption from trials. It is not. It's victory over trials! The "faith life" is: *"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."*

Abraham's Obedience Led to Famine

Look what happened to Abraham when he obeyed God and left Haran—he walked headlong into a famine! Abraham could have lamented, "Fine God you are, taking me out of the luxuries of Mesopotamia and leading me into a famine. I'll go back home where things are plentiful."

But he didn't do that. He trusted God to supply his needs and fulfill His promises. And years later when he arrived in Canaan God told him this in Genesis 13:15: *"All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. (16) I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. (17) Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."*

Tough times don't necessarily mean you've missed God's will, they are simply tests of faith.

> Paul was commissioned to reach the Gentiles but Nero incarcerated him. But that only spurred the writing of the prison epistles: Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians.
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> Moses was expatriated from Egypt and tested forty years. But his deliverance came when God ignited his staff at the burning bush and commanded him to tell Pharaoh, "*Let My people go.*"
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> Joseph languished through trials for years experiencing a series of deaths. He was rejected, imprisoned, and maligned, but his hopes never faded. And when his crowning moment came to interpret the King's dreams he did so with precision and prudence. In one day God promoted him from a prisoner to Egypt's Prime Minister.

(Transition) Let's consider one more death-resurrection experience Abraham encountered. Turn to Genesis 15 and let's read.

The Resurrection of Isaac (Genesis 15:1-7)

Notice Abraham's response: "*Abraham believed God; and he counted it to him as righteousness*" (15:6). But the difficulty arose years later, with the promise still lingering, when Abraham intruded upon God's plan and decided to expedite matters. That's when Sarah gave Abraham Hagar and Ishmael was born. And there's been continual strife and bloodshed between the Arab nations of Ishmael and Isaac.

Listen, never impinge upon God's providence. If God has a plan, He always has a timetable for its unfolding. God is omnipotent, and He wants our faith in His ability.

That's what he wanted from Abraham because Isaac wasn't born for another fourteen years when Abraham was ninety-nine, and Sarah was about ninety. Abraham and Sarah's reproductive systems were dormant. But that didn't inhibit God. He makes a promise, incubates it for years, buries it, and in His time resurrects it.

And that was the case with Abraham and Sarah. Their combined age was 190 when Isaac was born. Unbelievable! But God didn't want Abraham at twenty-five or seventy-five boasting of Isaac's birth. God deals in miracles and wonders because it forces man to give Him all the glory!

A sea-splitting miracle delivered Israel.

An asbestos type miracle encapsulated the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.

A buoyant miracle resurrected Elisha's axe head from the river-bottom.

A gravity-defying miracle lifted Enoch, Elisha, and Jesus into Heaven.

And His wonders never cease!

(Transition) God had one final and supreme test for Abraham. Again, it involved the sacrifice of the promise—his son Isaac:

Death and Resurrection of Isaac (Genesis 22:1–3)

Abraham's faith was stretched to its limits here. Isaac embodied everything God had promised, yet the Lord commanded Abraham to sacrifice him. But notice Abraham's unhesitating and undaunted faith. When Abraham spotted the mountain of sacrifice he left his servants at the foot of the mountain with these words: "*Stay here, while I and the lad go to worship and return to you.*" What Faith!

Until this point in history there's no record of anyone being resurrected. Yet Abraham anticipated it. That's exactly what Hebrews 11:19 says. Isaac said, "Dad, here's the wood and fire, but where is the sacrifice?" Abraham responded, "*Son, God will provide a lamb!*"

Abraham bound and placed Isaac on the altar and lifted the knife to plunge it into his Son of promise. That's when the angel intervened and stopped Abraham. And when Abraham turned around, he found a lamb caught in the bushes; a lamb ready for sacrifice.

Again, for all practical purposes, Abraham's promise was dead on that altar. But *"God Who Raises the Dead"* intervened. If your God-given dreams and promises are on the altar, leave them there. Your job is to keep believing, and God's job is to resurrect.

Conclusion

You recall that I mentioned how Paul speaks of a *"sentence of death"* being attached to a person God uses. That sounds strange, but it's because He wants our faith resting solely in Him and not some irreverent notion that our expertise accomplishes anything. Like Joseph, our hopes of fulfilling our dreams seem to fade and die in Pharaoh's prison. But this is God's design. The grain of wheat must die and fall into the ground before it produces a harvest. And why does God operate that way? To keep the focus of glory and praise on: *"God, Who raises the dead."*