

“Salvation is in the Present Tense”

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9). “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4).

From these and many other texts that might be cited it is evident that the Christian religion is a religion of the present tense. In the Christian life, nothing counts for anything except that which is present. Whatever has been in the past is valuable only for its present influence and effect; and the same is true of that which is to come.

To be born of God is to receive our life from Him, just as we receive life through birth from our earthly parents. But the new birth is a continuous process, and thus something that is ever present. It is the life from the Vine coming into us, the branches. (John 15:1). Thus it is a continuous flow of life from God into us. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

If religion were a thing of the past tense, we would be turning our eyes backward instead of forward; and if it belonged to the future tense, we would be always waiting for the appointed time. In either case there would be no growth. This is the great trouble with many who profess to be Christian; they look always either to the past or to the future. If to the past, they measure the possibilities of the Christian life by some past experience; or, having had some genuine experience in the past, they think it could not have been genuine because they afterwards fail; and then they become discouraged. And if to the future, they wait for a time that never comes, since they can only live in the present.

Christianity in the present tense takes a person just where it finds him; and therefore none need wait or be discouraged. The Lord purposes to save men, —all men in the world who will let Him do it—and He cannot do this except by taking them just where there are, and just where they are at each succeeding moment of their lives. And therefore His purpose is to take you just where you are, not only now, but at each moment which will become “now” as soon as you reach it. If He cannot save men in this way, He cannot save them at all. But He has assured us that He is able to save all, to the very uttermost, that will look unto Him.

And therefore the only thing to do is simply to look to Him now and believe now, without reference to the past failures or future hopes. The only starting point in the Christian life is “now;” the only point attainable is “now.” To live now is not to wish or resolve or anticipate now, but to believe and take. It is looking to Christ now. It is when we forget to live in the present moment by looking at that moment to Jesus Christ for grace and strength, —by taking Him at the present moment as God’s gift to us—that we fail.