

The Fullness of Christ

“A Living Christ – the Life of the Christian,” or,
“Joseph Alive”

By [Octavius Winslow](#)

And they left Egypt and returned to their father, Jacob, in the land of Canaan. "Joseph is still alive!" they told him. "And he is ruler over all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned at the news—he couldn't believe it. But when they had given him Joseph's messages, and when he saw the wagons loaded with the food sent by Joseph, his spirit revived. Genesis 45:25-27

There is not to the Christian, and to the Christian philosopher, a more interesting and instructive study than the *varied spiritual and mental exercises of the renewed soul*. Nothing takes so deep and powerful a hold upon the intellect, or penetrates so deeply the heart's hidden springs of feeling, as *the grace of God in the soul of man*. We hesitate not to say that man is an inexplicable mystery apart from revealed and vital religion. He is more than a material, or even intellectual being. He possesses, in addition to this, a moral nature, and as a moral being he must be studied, if his nature, history, and destiny are to be understood.

He may be a subject of inquiry ethnologically, physiologically, and intellectually—that is, in relation to his species, his material and rational organism; but until he is studied as a *spiritual* being, the wonders and powers of his complicated and glorious nature are still deeply veiled in their lonely grandeur from the eye, and man remains the profoundest mystery of the intelligent creation.

But Christianity places man in a new point of light, and constitutes him altogether a new object of study. The secret of this is in possession of the Christian student. It is this—The soul of man has been brought into vital contact with God, the great and holy Lord God, and this solves the mystery. Instinct with spiritual life, a partaker of the divine nature, a temple of the Holy Spirit, in a word, an entire new creature, he unfolds and exhibits powers of mind, and sensibilities of soul, a grandeur and sublimity of being, which the religion of Jesus and the grace of God alone could unveil, develop, and call into play.

The present incident of our narrative has suggested this train of thought. The joyous tidings are brought to Jacob that *Joseph is really alive*. He is overpowered by the information. The first announcement staggers his faith, and his heart dies within him. As *doubt* gives place to *conviction*, and conviction deepens into *assurance*, the spirit of Jacob revives, and he braces himself to meet the

occasion. What a rich and instructive page in the believer's experience does this incident unfold! The fact that Christ is alive, the conflicting feelings which that fact produces, the varied emotions- unbelief and its reaction, the swooning and the reviving- are points of profound interest. May the Holy Spirit be our Teacher. I take them in their order- the TIDINGS- the FAINTING- the REVIVING.

With regard to the TIDINGS, there appears to have been three things involved in it of a most interesting and touching character- First, that Joseph was alive; second, that being alive, he was exalted to great dignity and power; and third, that, though thus exalted, he still remembered with affection and regarded with kindness his father's house. We shall pursue briefly these three points as illustrating some of the most vital, precious, sanctifying truths ever uttered in the ears of the believer in Jesus.

The first fact which this joyous intelligence conveyed to the aged patriarch was, that Joseph was alive: "Joseph is still alive!" The image of his death- a death which to his mind had been attended with circumstances of such brutality- still flung its dark shadow on the spirit of Jacob; but in a moment, like an electric flash, the information is brought to him that his son, long lost, and, to his mind, long dead, was alive- actually living- and that he was now confronted by the witnesses of the astounding and thrilling truth. Beloved, what is the grand central truth of the gospel, the fact around which all its other facts revolve, and from which all other truths derive their vitality? Is it not that Jesus, our true Joseph, is alive?

Alas! we have to do in our present condition so much with death- death within, death without, death all around us, and the grim tyrant, with uplifted dart, standing at the very termination of our pilgrimage- how soothing and delightful it is for a child of God to turn from its contemplation, and find himself dealing with life! And what is the grand, quickening truth of the Bible- the great and precious fact which transmits its vitality to every part? It is *a living Savior- a living Christ- a living Intercessor- in a word, that Jesus lives*. When the first builders of the glorious temple of truth went forth to build the sacred fabric, like master workmen they laid the broad basis of the edifice in the glorious announcement, in the indisputable fact, that Jesus was alive. Could they but make good and demonstrate this one fact, the whole fabric of Christianity stood firm on a rock which no power could overthrow. We therefore find that the grand truth upon which the early preachers of Christianity everywhere dwelt was, not the *death of Christ*, marvellous and precious as that fact was, but, the *resurrection of Christ*, the confirmation and groundwork of His death. It was not so much that Christ was crucified, as that He was risen, that they testified; and for their testimony to this truth they were willing to endure scorn and ridicule, contempt and persecution, no, a martyr's death. Thus we read, "One of these men which have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." "Jesus, who was

dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."

In these touching words does Paul refer to the persecutions he endured for this truth: "Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." The daily persecution was the dying of the Lord Jesus; the daily succor and support was the manifestation of the life of the Lord Jesus. The very scars of the Lord Jesus which they bore were so many evidences that Christ was alive. Had not Christ risen from the dead, they had then been exempt from the hatred and persecution of the Sanhedrin, all whose power had been exerted to disprove and invalidate this one fact of Christianity, and this central doctrine of their preaching. But every epithet of scorn with which they were denounced, and every form of persecution through which they passed, but confirmed the fact that Jesus was alive. It was not likely that, simpleminded and feeble men as they were, they would be willing to endure all they did in testifying to what they knew to be false. No man will heroically sacrifice his life, or endure a moral martyrdom in support of a known lie; but when conscious that he is testifying to a truth, that he is witnessing to and ratifying a fact, if he be a man of integrity, honesty, and courage, he will be ready to seal his testimony with a martyr's death. Thus did the apostles- so important and precious to their heart was the truth that Jesus was alive.

And is the doctrine less sweet, precious, and blessed to us? Ah, no! Rob me of the truth that Jesus lives, take from me the great fact that Christ is alive at the right hand of God, and oh, you have thrown the pall of eternal death over all the bright hopes of my soul. But let my faith realize that Jesus lives, and that I live in Jesus, that I have a life from Jesus, that my eternal life is bound up with Jesus, that a living Christ supports and sustains me moment by moment, and that because Jesus lives I shall live also, and you have given me a talisman of hope that will bear me cheerfully onward through all the changing scenes and sufferings of life, painting its brilliant bow upon each dark cloud of my earthly pilgrimage; you have, in a word, thrown open to me the very portal of heaven. Let but this precious truth, by the power of the Spirit, be brought home to your heart when it is low, struggling with sin, fighting with temptation, battling with the world, when difficulties, trials, and depressions weave their web around your path- let but the blessed Spirit testify to your soul that Jesus lives, and lives to sustain you, to pray for you; to deliver you, and in a moment you are conscious of a new-born energy, you float in calmness and security upon the crest of the highest billow.

The touching incident of a little child sitting in the lap of its widowed, weeping mother, and looking up earnestly into her face, asked, "Mamma, is Jesus dead?" will be familiar to the reader. Gentle chiding! precious soothing from a babe's lips! Yes! God can teach and comfort us by a little child, if this be but the truth brought home in simple, touching earnestness to our sorrow-stricken heart. Jesus is not dead, but lives to bind up the broken heart, to dry the tear, and supply the needs

of His saints- to cause the widow's heart to leap for joy, and to befriend, and guide, and comfort the orphan.

What though some human hopes are fled, what though some earthly friends are gone, what though some cherished joys are withered, Jesus lives, and you shall live through all life's trials, and through all eternity's glories- your life forever entwined with Christ in God.

But Joseph was not only alive, he was also exalted to great dignity, power, and wealth. He might have been alive, but still the slave for which his brethren sold him. He might indeed have been alive, but in great poverty, lowliness, and obscurity. So far from this being the case, he was not only alive, but he was advanced to be the chief man of the realm, second only to the king upon the throne. This fact must have imparted additional confidence and solace to the mind of the aged patriarch. Is it less a joyous, less a satisfying, less a precious fact to you to know that Jesus Christ has- as we have shown in the preceding chapter- passed through all the dark stages of His abasement and suffering, and is now enshrined in the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, with the added glory of mediatorial supremacy and government, sitting at the right hand of the Father, holding the scepter of universal empire, all powers and principalities subject to Him, and "waiting until His enemies be made His footstool?"

Oh, we ask, is it not a glorious and precious announcement to the Church that her Savior not only lives, but that He fills the central throne in heaven, that all beings bend before His majesty, and that He has power over all flesh? Is it not a precious truth to you that Jesus, once "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," once spit upon, insulted, tempted, crucified, is now exalted a Prince and a Savior, the triumphant Head of the Church, and is preparing to appear again in His glorified kingdom? Yes! it is a precious truth, that "Him has God highly exalted," and that in that exaltation and glory you who believe shall share.

There is another feature in this announcement that must have been precious, I had almost said, the most precious, because it was the most touching: it was, not only that Joseph was *alive*, and that he was *exalted* to great dignity, power, and wealth, but that he loved his father and that he remembered his brethren still, that he had purposes and thoughts of kindness and mercy towards those who his heart yearned to unfold. *Beloved, not only is Jesus alive, not only is He exalted to great dignity, clothed with boundless power, and is possessed of endless wealth- all of which He exercises on your behalf- but He loves you, has purposes of mercy, and thoughts of peace, and feelings of compassion towards you, thinks of you, prays for you, is perpetually guarding your person and consulting your highest interests, until He sends His chariot to bear you home to Himself.* "I go to prepare a place for you....I will come again to receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." Realize this precious truth, and it will shed many a bright gleam on your dreary

way, and uplift your thoughts, affections, and hopes, from earth to heaven.

Let us now observe the effect of these tidings on Jacob's heart. How was the first information of this gladsome announcement received by the patriarch? Jacob's heart fainted through unbelief. The tidings seemed too great and joyous to be *true*. "And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not." What an impressive and instructive illustration of that unbelief which marks our Christian course in some of its circumstances and stages in life- unbelief awakened by the very vastness, the very preciousness, the very joyousness of the truths of the gospel, of the words, the invitations, and promises of Jesus. In common language, it seems "too good to be true," too vast for faith to credit, too overpowering for the mind to grasp, too precious for the heart to receive.

Beloved, it is astonishing how faith and unbelief operate here. How diverse and opposite are their actings! For example, *faith always looks at the bright side of a dark picture; unbelief always looks at the dark side of a bright picture*. Unbelief often discards a fact because it is too vast and precious to believe; but faith can extract oftentimes from a dispensation that is gloomy and threatening, the sweetest joy and the brightest hope. Faith can transform a curse into a blessing; while unbelief will often turn a blessing into a curse. Do we not find something like this in our spiritual experience- unbelief not giving full, unquestioning, prompt credence to the revelation of God's Word, especially the announcements respecting a living Christ?

We might cite a Scripture instance of this. You are aware that when the first announcement was made to the Church of the resurrection of Christ, they could not believe, actually did not credit, the fact that the Lord was really alive, because of the overpowering joy which the tidings produced. And even when the fact that He was risen from the dead was confirmed by His actual and personal appearance among them, they still doubted! "And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?'" Mark the significant words, "they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement."

We now turn to our own Christian experience, as illustrating a few of the exercises of unbelief. In the first place, we cite the fact, the faint hold we have of the truth that Jesus is alive at the right hand of God, *bearing our name on His heart, our burden on His shoulder, and with uplifted and pierced hands making intercession for us in heaven*. Does not the working of unbelief often rob you of the power, the preciousness, and influence of this truth- that Jesus is alive? Is not your faith's grasp of it often weak, wavering, unrealizing? Oh! had we a stronger faith in the fact that Jesus is actually alive, we should not be so often and so deeply cast down as we are- succumbing to fears within, and to conflicts without, to the dark and trying providences which shade and sadden our path. We would not believe that some day our enemy would prevail, that we would at last come short of heaven. We would never inquire, "Who will roll us away the

stone?" or, "Who will supply a table in the wilderness?" No! the reason why our hands droop and our knees tremble in this glorious and spiritual life is because *our faith has such a vague, uncertain, tremulous grasp of this gospel, vital truth- a risen, living, loving, and interceding Christ.* Oh, we are but *half believers* in what the Bible says of Jesus, and in what Jesus himself says.

Then, with regard to the Promises of God, see how our faith is constantly at fault. The promises of God are the divine affirmations and pledges of His faithfulness and love to His saints. These "exceeding great and precious promises" are God's promissory notes- to speak commercially- which He has given us, assuring us that if we plead and present these promissory notes in faith and prayer, He will acknowledge, honor, and make them good. And yet, such is the working of unbelief, that our hearts faint within us under new trials and reverses, although we have these precious promises of God to rely upon and to plead- all pledging the unchanging love, the covenant faithfulness, and the infinite power of God on our behalf; as if He had not said, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed: but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you." May we not, in view of this feeble, fluctuating faith which we have in the promises of God, and in the God of the promises, repeat the statement we have just made, that we do but *half believe what we profess fully to believe!*

How faint and dim, too, is our faith's realization of the eternal glory that awaits as! How little do we live on that precious truth- the certain salvation of every believer in Jesus, and the eternal glorification of every child of God? Did we more vividly realize it, we should be less desponding and discouraged by reason of the difficulties we meet, the inbred sins we combat, our own shortcomings, and Satan's constant suggestions. Did our faith more firmly believe that the Lord's flock, "the flock of the slaughter," shall never be plucked from the Shepherd's hand, that not one of them shall perish, that the weakest believer and the lowliest saint of God, the soul that has but touched in faith the border of the Saviors robe, shall finally and certainly be brought to glory, would it not enable us to enter more fully into the experience of the apostle, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?"

I will only refer to what ought to humble us very much, the weakness of our faith in the great and glorious fact of a coming Lord. Oh, how little does our faith deal with the glorious truth of the second personal advent of our Lord Jesus Christ! Beloved, the promise of a coming Savior has ever been the hope of God's Church. It was the hope of the Church of old. They saw His star in the dim, distant vista of time, believed and rejoiced. "Your father Abraham saw My day, and was glad." Faith in a promised and coming Messiah sustained them in persecution, bore them through trials, tuned their harps, inspired their prophecies, and shed the faint beams of the Sun of Righteousness upon their departing hours. The coming Christ, the glorious appearing of the Lord, is still the pole-star of the saints of God, who are described as "looking for that BLESSED

HOPE, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

My reader, if you are a believer in Jesus, you will be one of the blissful throng who will cluster around the descending form of the Son of God, when He comes in the clouds of heaven "to be admired by His saints, and to be adored in all those who believe." He is coming to raise us from corruption, to perfect us in His own likeness, to reunite us to those who sleep in Him, to give us the victory over all our enemies, and to associate us with His glorious and eternal reign. "Therefore, comfort one another with these words." Embrace this hope with stronger faith, and you will realize one of the most soothing, animating, sanctifying doctrines of revelation. "I will come again and receive you to myself." Sweet words! "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," be your heart's response. Prophets sung of it, evangelists portrayed it, apostles wrote of it; let your faith embrace it, living and dying in the blessed hope of the personal advent of the Lord to consummate the glory and bliss of His saints. "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall you be established; believe His prophets, so shall you prosper."

We now reach the last part of the subject of the present chapter- the reviving of Jacob's faith. The depression of the aged patriarch was but *momentary*. There is just this difference between a regenerate and an unregenerate man -the unbelief of the unregenerate man is continuous, that of the child of God is but momentary. He may be greatly depressed because of unbelief, his heart sorrowing within him; but such is the divine nature, *the indestructible energy of real faith*, it ever emerges from the darkest cloud, floats upon the highest billow, and comes out of the battle bearing in its hand the spoils and the laurels of victory. See it illustrated in the history of Jacob; *the depression was but momentary*. Now came the uplifting, the revival of his drooping faith. What was it that roused its pulse, and restored him, as it were, to life? The first thing was, "they told him all the words of Joseph;" and these words were the first inspiration of his depressed and dejected spirit.

Beloved, what is it that truly and effectually revives the drooping faith, and uplifts the disconsolate spirit of the child of God- rolls off the melancholy that crushed his mind, and disperses the dark cloud that hung over his soul? Oh, it is *the words of Jesus!* Are there any words to you like His? When Christ comes and speaks a promise, and says to you, "Be not depressed, My grace is sufficient for you; be not cast down, My strength is made perfect in weakness; be not disconsolate, I will come again and receive you to myself." Oh, what words so reviving, so quickening, and so cheering to the child of God as these words of Jesus? And when the Eternal Spirit brings the very words, statements, promises, and assurances of Jesus, unfolds them to the eye, whispers them to the ear, reveals them to the mind, engraves them on the heart, I ask you whether it has not been like an inspiration direct from heaven? Has it not been like a cordial to your fainting spirit? Has it not infused new life into your soul?

See how the angels at the tomb revived and cheered the drooping hearts of

those holy women, who came with their spices early to the sepulcher, by the words of Jesus! "And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: *remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words.*"

And thus it is the Holy Spirit the Comforter revives and cheers the fainting hearts of God's people, by bringing to their remembrance and speaking to their hearts the very words of *comfort* and *promise* and *guidance* which Jesus himself has spoken. "But the Comforter," says Christ, "who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you." *No words like those of Jesus for the nourishment of faith, for the quieting of conscience, for the guidance of our perplexities, and the reassuring of our confidence and hope.* That one saying of Jesus is worth untold worlds, "He who comes unto me I will in never cast out." *Oh, cling to the revealed words of Christ, and esteem them more precious than gold, and sweeter than honey.*

But we trace the reviving of the patriarch's faith to another cause, the power of evidence: "And when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived." Now, here was clearly the acting of faith, aided by the operation of sight. Seeing the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him to Egypt, laden as they were with provision for the journey, there was *evidence* clear and unmistakable on which his drooping faith could rest. Here mark the condescension of the Lord to the weak and fainting faith of His disciples. I do not for a moment ignore the idea that the Lord may at times revive the heart of the drooping believer by *sight* as well as by *faith*, or, in other words, that faith is aided by sight. Were this idea rejected, we must ignore the institution of the Lord's Supper itself, for most assuredly, our faith in the death and atoning sacrifice of Jesus is essentially aided by these visible and expressive symbols.

And was it not so with Gideon? He was summoned to a great work, but his faith staggered, and he asked God for some evidence that He was true in what He promised, and God gave it him. He asked that the fleece might be saturated with the dew of heaven, and God granted his request. Still his faith staggered, and he asked another evidence of His faithfulness, that the fleece might be all night on the earth and remain dry, and in the morning it was so; and thus God strengthened his faith by the evidence of sight.

We select a case in point from the New Testament- that of the unbelieving disciple, Thomas. He would not believe the evidence of the disciples that Jesus was alive. "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus

knew it. Presenting Himself in the midst of His assembled disciples, He singled out Thomas from the group, and said, "Thomas, reach here your finger, and behold my hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." As if He had said, "I will stoop to your weak faith, and will give you the evidence of *sight*; you shall see, and handle, and know that I am indeed your risen, living Lord."

Oh, the condescension of Jesus to weak faith! And when the eye of faith is dim, Christ will come and give you some sensible token or evidence that He is yours, that His word of promise, on which He has caused your soul to hope, shall be made good. God will have you look to your mercies, to your blessings, to all His dealings with your life, in order that your faith in Him may be revived and strengthened. He will have you throw back a glance on the past of your journey, trace all *His providential interpositions on your behalf*, and remember the time when your heart was sorrowful, and how He comforted it; when your mind was desponding; and how He sustained it; when your path was dreary, and how cheered it; when your needs were pressing, and how He supplied them; and when the cloud was dark, and your trouble threatened and your foe was ready to devour you, how He appeared for your help and deliverance.

Yes, God will have you look at these witnesses that He is faithful to His promises and faithful to His saints. Listen to the Psalmist- "I would have fainted, unless I had believed to SEE the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, wait, I say, on the Lord." Thus may our soul be found in holy waiting upon, and waiting for the Lord! The wagons laden with tokens and pledges of heaven have come. "Christ is risen the first fruits of those who sleep." "And not only they, but ourselves have the first-fruits of the Spirit." Let us look at the *promises* and the *providences* and the unspeakable Gift of God, and our faith, so ready to fail, and our spirit, so prone to faint, will be strengthened and revived, and we shall be preparing to take our last stage home to God. "Faint, yet pursuing," will be our motto, until faith is turned into sight, and we wake up in glory perfected in His likeness, satisfied with all the way by which the Lord our God conducted us there.

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