



## Peter

Peter is alive. With that you have said almost everything.

Once every three weeks his father, a widower, comes to visit him, with admirable loyalty. He has a strong bond with the boy, even though it comes only from one side. He holds Peter's hand for a while and then he leaves again — after only five minutes. It doesn't have to be longer and it wouldn't make a difference. Peter lies tied to his bed. A vegetable, one says. A hopeless case, says the other. How many years has it been already? There is no recognition at all. Or is there? Sometimes there is a glimpse of a smile, but it always disappears prematurely.

Why not give up this life for a merciful death? Hasn't the quality of Peter's existence been dashed?

But what is death? What is life? *"Leave the dead to bury their own dead,"* Christ once said. Death? The heart stands still, the brains don't function any more. But Christ shows that death has a much deeper dimension. He gives a new name to believers who have died: the sleepers. He also gives a new name to those who are alive and kicking: the dead.

What Christ means by this is apparent from the parable of the prodigal son. The son leaves his father. He wants to live as he pleases, to party like an animal. He does end up among the pigs, hungering for pigs' slop. When he returns to his father, a type of Easter is celebrated. His father says, *"He was dead and is alive again."*

Being dead is this: to be far away from the Father. To live without God is being alive yet dead. Then you might say, "I'm living it up!" but you are dying. To be separate from God is deadly. Living without communication with the Source of Life above you is like being a bunch of flowers, picked with stem and all, to brighten up a table somewhere. They look great for two weeks — an explosion of sweet-smelling colourful life in a vase — but in a short time the prettiest flowers wither and are ready for the garbage. Dead. The link with the soil was broken.

The heart of the prodigal son beat passionately. "At least that is life!" many would say. But he didn't live for his father. And therefore the son withered so quickly. His existence was broken before he knew it.

The dead? They are not the people who lie buried in the cemetery, for part of them lives with God. The dead are those people who lie under God's wrath.

The prodigal son wanted to improve the quality of his existence by leaving home. Then it became apparent what quality of life is without God. It is being dead, even though you might hang a label on it that says, "the best quality!" Your life can only regain its quality when you have an active relationship with God. Then you don't live any more under God's wrathful eyes and punishing hand, but you live under his friendly eyes. And He puts His arm around you just like the prodigal son, and says, *"This is the quality of your existence, that you may live again in my love."*

The Father has mercy on Peter. There are people who appear to live but are living corpses. But it also happens the other way around. There are people who are severely handicapped or very senile about whom the Father says, *"They are My children. I shall never leave them. They shall live in My love. I have a strong bond with them, even though it comes now only from one side."* The quality of Peter's existence is the arm of his Father who surrounds him.

Broken and bruised children of God lie waiting — sometimes unknowingly — for the flourishing period that is to come. Their life is a cry on earth. What is man? Their life is a cry to God. Come Lord Jesus! Their life is a song of grace. It comes from one side.

Once every three weeks his father comes to visit him, with admirable loyalty. He holds Peter's hand for a while and then he leaves — after only five minutes. Once a year his father breaks this triweekly routine. On Easter Sunday afternoon, he never fails to come.

Then he stays a while longer.

The other Father never comes to visit. He is there. He always holds Peter's hand and never leaves. He gathers the lambs in His arms. What would you call *this* loyalty?

Peter lives in the Father's love. And with that we have said everything!

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