

## CHRISTMAS GLORY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EYES TO SEE IT - Pt. 3

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### CHRISTMAS GLORY AND OUR HIGHEST PURPOSE AND DESTINY

**John 3:16** - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **shall not perish, but have eternal life.**"

It's that last phrase that intrigues me. I want to go through various passages in John's gospel to figure out exactly what that term "**eternal life**" means.

It's not often we celebrate Christmas Eve on a Sunday. I suppose it has its inconvenient elements. But when Christmas is so deeply anchored to the God's plan to freely extend eternal life it seems almost mathematically appropriate to gather around this Christmas text on the day recognized throughout the history of the church as celebrative of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. It ties the Christmas event to its full circle and purpose.

Jesus Himself identifies the true meaning of Christmas - **John 10:10b** - "**I came (that's Christmas) that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**"

Remember, **eternal life is Christ's aim for everyone at Christmas!** And so, it's our aim at Cedarview that everyone has eternal life through Jesus Christ, God the Son. It's our aim in this service that **you** have eternal life. That's the whole reason Jesus came. We want you to **have** eternal life. We want you to **know** you have eternal life. We want you to **relish and enjoy** eternal life. And, in addition to all of that, we want you to **share** the hope of eternal life this Christmas season. Remember Jesus' promise: He said that if He was lifted up He would draw all people to Himself.

Do you know what eternal life is? Do you **really** know? Is it just **unending** life? **When** is it experienced? **How** is it experienced. How can you **know** if you actually possess it? Every Christian (and everyone **considering** Christianity) needs to know the answer to these questions. They are the most important questions in all the world. There is absolutely nothing else you are wondering about that even compares in importance to these questions.

We're going to walk through what I'm calling the **stages** of eternal life in this teaching. As we walk through them, consider your own heart. See where you are. At what stage is your life? What is your present **experience** of eternal life? Everyone here needs to consider this issue prayerfully and carefully:

#### 1) **ETERNAL LIFE HAS ITS SOURCE IN JESUS CHRIST, GOD THE SON**

If you are going to think properly about the Christian life at all, you must begin with a proper understanding of the basics. None of us is too mature to rethink these things. What we're dealing with right now is the foundation - the ground-work - for keeping our heads straight about Jesus Christ in a world full of religions and philosophies.

Please remember this great central tenet of sound doctrine: **Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the source of eternal life.** Here's what I mean when I say that:

- a) **Eternal life is not something any one of us has by nature.** By that I mean eternal life is not merely the human spirit or human potential. No matter how good, or how brilliant, or how humanitarian, or how noble or moral - no one on this planet possesses eternal life in himself or herself.

In one of the great Christmas chapters of the Bible - John chapter one - John keys in on some of the central truths about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God the Son. Notice one of the first things he says:

**John 1:4** - "**In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.**"

What can John mean when he says life was **in** Jesus Christ? I mean, don't we **all** have life? We're breathing, aren't we? We aren't physically dead. We aren't corpses. You and I are both, hopefully, alive in this gathering.

So in what sense was John saying something **unique** about Jesus when he said, "**In Him was life...?**" And how is the fact that life was in Jesus Christ relevant to you and me today?

I think you will see at least part of the explanation when John explains this phrase with more detail a little farther on in his gospel: **John 5:26** - "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself..."

The key words to catch are those words, "in Himself." They are repeated in reference to both the Father and the Son. In other words, they have life in a way you and I do not. Our whole problem is we **don't** have life in ourselves. All we have is **limited life** - limited continuous existence.

What the Father and the Son have, and we do **not** have, is the capacity for continuous self-existence. We have **temporary, dependant existence**. Then, even if we enjoy good health, we grow old and die. In terms of our earthly existence, we just wear out. We stop breathing. Life leaves our bodies, and there is absolutely nothing we can do about this. We simply **don't have life in ourselves**.

So, Jesus Christ has eternal life just as the Father has eternal life - **as a feature of His own existence**. But there is an **additional feature** of eternal life as it relates to Jesus Christ:

b) **The Father has ordained the Son to be the avenue, or the provider of eternal life to this fallen world.**

**1 John 5:11-12** - "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. {12} He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."

This is the place to start when you think about God's **destiny** for us through Christ Jesus. This is the whole point of Christmas. This is the goal of the Incarnation. God wants to give us - wants to give us **perishing** sinful mortals - eternal life.

So, the **first** thing we need to understand about eternal life is that eternal life has its **source** in Jesus Christ, God the Son. **We don't possess it in ourselves**. And the **second** thing we need to know about eternal life is if we're ever going to **have** eternal life, we're going to have to come to Jesus Christ to receive it.

Now let's look at stage two on the path to eternal life:

2) **WE RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE BY BEING LINKED TO JESUS CHRIST, GOD THE SON, THROUGH BELIEF IN HIM**

One of the best pictures of what believing in Jesus Christ means, and what it accomplishes, is found in the fifteenth chapter of John's gospel:

**John 15:5** - "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Through knowing the truth about **who Jesus is** and **why He came** and then **trusting and loving that He did this for you**, you are connected - linked up - with the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus likened it to the way the life of the vine flows into the branches. As we are linked to Christ through personal agreement and trust, His life - His **eternal life** - the life He has in Himself - is credited and applied and made transforming in our own natures.

And please notice, there is no one else to whom we can go for eternal life. No other religious leader or prophet or teacher **has** eternal life to give. This is very important. In John 15 Jesus is not talking merely about the transference of **ideas** or **thoughts** from Him to us. He is talking about the source of **life**. That's what a branch received from the vine. It's not just **information** about botany. It's **life** itself. This is what faith in Christ Jesus produces in our natures - not just **religious ideas**, but **eternal life**.

3) **ETERNAL LIFE IS FURTHER NOURISHED AND SUSTAINED BY THE SPIRITUAL FEEDING ON THE WORD OF GOD**

**John 6:68** - "Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have **words of eternal life.**"

This is very important. Here we see that eternal life is somehow further mediated by the words of Jesus Christ. His teaching **sustains** and **feeds** eternal life. Peter calls Jesus' words - "**words of eternal life.**"

Of course, eternal life is more than just words - print on paper. We have seen that eternal life comes from being

linked to Jesus Christ, God the Son, through living faith. But the mind can't believe what it has no knowledge of. Your heart can't embrace a vacuum. There needs to be truth content. Peter recognized that this truth only came through the words of Jesus.

Now Peter wasn't being silly here. He knew there was much truth in the world that wasn't directly linked to facts about Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't teach Peter how to fish. Matthew knew how to collect taxes before he ever met Jesus.

When Peter says only Jesus had the truth, he was referring to the truth about **eternal life**. Nobody but Jesus could teach them about eternal life. Nobody but Jesus could tell them how to **receive** eternal life. Nobody but Jesus could **draw their hearts toward eternal life**. If eternal life is what you're interested in, you don't have **multiple** sources to consider. Only Jesus' words can tell you the truth about sin, grace, heaven, and life eternal.

I frequently wonder if we truly appreciate the **value** of the words of eternal life. We have them before us so often. The Word truly has the power to prompt your heart onward in eternal life. It has the power to make your heart **spiritually clean** and **alert**. **Through the power of the Holy Spirit the Word of God actually transmits eternal life.**

Let's continue with the next stage of eternal life:

#### 4) **ETERNAL LIFE BESTOWS A PRESENT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

In **John chapter 17** Jesus is praying to the Father. He gives one of the most beautiful descriptions of eternal life in the whole Bible:

**John 17:3** - "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

Eternal life is a personal, intimate knowing of God. It is not just some impersonal inoculation against hell and judgment. It doesn't just exist in your being **unconsciously**. It is not like a vaccination against small-pox. I had one of those when I was in grade 4. I've never considered it since. I am totally unaware of its presence and influence in my being.

I can't say strongly enough that eternal life is **not** like that. If you have eternal life you begin to love and know God. You prize and treasure different things. You sense the emptiness and triteness of many things you used to treasure. This is what John meant earlier in remarks we've already looked at from chapter one of his gospel:

**John 1:4** - "In Him was life, and *the life was the Light of men.*"

Eternal life **sheds light** on the knowledge of God. You begin to **see** things you didn't see before - **2 Corinthians 3:18** - "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

**"Beholding the glory of the Lord...."** - That's Paul's way of saying what John meant when he said, **"...whoever believes in him has eternal life."**

**Values are changed.** You begin to have a fresh, personal, deep apprehension of God. Before you may have had some thoughts. You may have had some ideas. You may have included these thoughts in your overall philosophy of life. But that's not what John says eternal life is all about at all.

Eternal life brings the light of a personal knowledge of God into your heart through Jesus Christ. It is not just a **religious** thing. It is a **personal** thing. We can pray and live and know communion with God day by day.

#### 5) **ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT SUSPENDED OR INTERRUPTED AT DEATH**

**John 11:25-26** - "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, {26} and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?'"

These are Jesus' words to Martha as He is about to raise her brother Lazarus from the dead.

Of course, people die physically. People do experience death in this world. Even Lazarus died - **twice!** But I think what Jesus means in these words is this: everyone who has eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ will never have that life **stripped away from him or her**. Even if he dies, he will live.

In other words, **eternal life** will never be turned into **temporary life**. Nothing, not even death itself, can take eternal life from those who are united with Jesus Christ.

John Piper writes of one of the most moving experiences of his life at the funeral of one of his professors at Fuller Seminary:

***“One of the most powerful moments in my seminary life was at the funeral of one of my professors, James Morgan, 37 years old, with a wife and four young children. Lewis Smedes gave the message from these verses of Jesus words to Martha at the death of her brother, Lazarus. At one point he lifted his voice to a very loud level, and with tremendous authority said, “James Morgan is not dead! For Jesus has promised, ‘Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die!’”***

Tell everyone you know this Christmas, **“Eternal life in Jesus Christ will never be turned into temporary life. Never!”**

6) **ETERNAL LIFE WILL BE MANIFESTED IN ITS COMPLETE FORM WHEN OUR BODIES ARE RAISED FROM THEIR GRAVES AND UNITED WITH OUR SPIRITS**

The Bible actually speaks of this final phase as being the completion of the eternal life begun right here and now in this earthly life: **John 6:40** - **“For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”**

Note those strong words, **“I myself will raise him up....”** No doubt, Jesus has done many wonderful things for you in this earthly life. But one of the greatest things He will do for you is still in the future. Jesus said, while you won't even be physically around to **ask** Him to do it, He will **raise your body up at the last day!**

And did you catch the way Jesus referred to Himself to Martha in John chapter eleven? Look at it quickly again:

**John 11:25-26** - **“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life...”**

Only Jesus can identify Himself like this. And you can see the aspect of eternal life He's thinking about here. Jesus is laboring to make Himself absolutely clear. Not only is He the **life** - He's the **resurrection** and the life!

This is the issue of Christmas. This is the **destiny of Christmas glory**. Never make it smaller or more sentimental than this. **Eternal life is for ever and ever**. This is what's at stake. Does all of this excite you? Or does it make you uneasy? Does it fill you with joy, or make you tremble? Say this whole Christmas verse with me - **John 3:16** - **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**