

It's Who You Know

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- [0 : 0 0] Good afternoon all, and it is a good afternoon. It's a beautiful time that we're having just now. I want to focus on something that probably we don't think enough about these days.
- But here's something that C.S. Lewis said, just to start off our thinking today. He said that Christianity maintains that every individual human being is going to live forever.
- And we say that because that's what the Bible says, that's what God's Word says. Every human being is going to live forever. The question is, where are we going to live forever? And in what condition are we going to live forever?
- And with whom are we going to live forever? These are big questions. Now, C.S. Lewis said this. He said, this assertion that people are going to live forever must be either true or false.
- There's no possibility it can be sort of halfway. It's either true that we're going to live forever, or it's false that we're going to live forever. Now, there are a good many things, says Lewis, that would not be worth bothering about if I was only going to live for 70 years.
- [1 : 2 3] But which I had better bother about, very seriously, if I'm going to live forever. Do we grasp what he's saying there?
- This is an enormous question that's before us. If we're only going to live for 70 years, then there are lots of things that we don't really need to bother about.
- Questions relating to eternity are of no consequence to us. But if I'm going to live forever, then I really need answers to the questions. How can I be sure of how I'm going to live forever?
- Where am I going to live forever? Who am I going to live with forever? And what condition am I going to be in as I live forever? These are enormous questions. And we can only answer them in this life.
- So, my friends, we're going to look at the whole question of eternal life today. The most famous verse in the Bible, Now, we all click on to the second half of that verse and we think, how wonderful that God would love the world in such a way that people could believe in his Son and have eternal life.
- [2 : 5 1] Isn't that wonderful? But there's a sting in the tail of that verse. That those who believe in him should not perish.
- Because clearly that verse, the favorite verse in the Bible, is saying something very deep, very profound and very scary. That when we don't believe in Jesus, we do perish.
- There is no security apart from him. If I'm only going to live for 70 years and then you die and that's the end of it, as many people maintain these days, then it's nowhere near as big a question if there's nothing after death.
- But if God has sent his Son to give us eternal life so that we will not perish, then we really had better get our minds very clear about what the truth is.
- So, let's think of this for a moment. I want to take you into John 17 just for a moment. It's just a brief word that comes from the Saviour's own lips.

- [4 : 08] And I want you to notice something absolutely wonderful here. Excuse me, I've got the wrong place. I had it looked up. But mice and men and technology.
- There we are. Right. Jesus had been talking to his disciples.
- He's been preparing them for the fact that he's going away to leave them. And he has to go back to the Father in heaven. So he wants them to be prepared and to understand things.
- And then all of a sudden, right in the midst of conversation, right in the midst of walking with them, as it were, through the woods, we're told this. Jesus, when he had spoken this words, lifted his eyes up to heaven.
- And he said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son. And it's this idea of Jesus just lifting his eyes up to heaven, just there and then.
- [5 : 12] I remember reading about the great Victorian preacher, Charles Spurgeon, walking through the woods on a beautiful summer's day with a friend. They were enjoying the blue sky and the birds chirping and the trees out there and all the flowers in bloom.
- And they were having a great time. And one of them had just cracked a joke. And they were having a real good laugh. And then all of a sudden, they turned a path in the woods. And here was a log right across the path.
- And Spurgeon, just instantly, just said to his friend, Hey, this is a lovely spot. Let's just seek the Father. And he dropped to his knees and he started to pray.
- Just like it was as natural as laughing at a joke with his friend a minute before. My brothers and sisters, that's exactly what Jesus does here. There's no seam.
- There's nothing to see. He's just so close to the Father. So aware of the Father's presence that no matter what he's doing and no matter the pressures that are on him, because he knows he's going to be dying the next day.
- [6 : 15] But in the midst of all those pressures, he can just drop what he's doing. Lift his eyes to heaven and say, Father, the hour has come.
- This is what it was all about. This is why I came. You know, we're actually born ignorant of God.
- And if we're not, it wouldn't make sense what Jesus is about to say. Because he goes on to say this. Since you have given the Son authority over all flesh to give eternal life, eternal life to all whom you've given him.
- Well, this is eternal life, says Jesus. Now, most of us, if we were asked what eternal life is, we would say, well, it's life that doesn't end. But that's not Jesus' definition.
- Listen to this. This is eternal life. That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
- [7 : 24] Now, folks, if we've got eternal life today, it means that we know Jesus. And it means we know the Father because we know Jesus.
- And if we don't know God, the Father, and we don't know Jesus, if there's no personal relationship there, we don't have eternal life. You know, I was deeply involved in church life, oh, for well over a decade, 15, 16 years, I suppose, before I could say that I knew God.
- I never missed church. I was always there. I was in the thick of it. I was doing everything. But I didn't know God.
- And I didn't know Jesus. I remember Billy Graham once famously said, you know, sitting in a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a motor car.

And it's so important that we understand that we can be cheated by religion. Religion is man's attempt to climb up to God, to satisfy him, to impress God with what we're doing for him.

[8 : 48] And that's never going to get us anywhere, and we'll see that in a wee while. So the question is, who here wants to live forever? There's my hand up. Okay.

Keep your hand up if you want to live forever with Jesus. Yeah. Now, who would like to live forever with the devil? You see, that's the only alternative to living with Jesus.

My granny used to tell me when I was a wee boy, you'll go to the bad fire. And she used to tell me often.

So I'll leave you to guess why that was. But you know, when you're grown up, you get to the point where you think, well, that was granny's scare story to keep me good when I was a wee boy.

And because it was granny's scare story, I don't believe that anymore. There's no such thing as the bad fire. Actually, that's a lie of the devil.

[9 : 59] There is such a thing as the bad fire. There is such a thing as hell. And no one spoke more about it in Scripture than Jesus. Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else in Scripture.

Most of what we know about hell came from the lips of Jesus. Does that mean he's not the king of love that we thought he was? No, it means precisely the opposite.

It means that he came here because he knows, he knows and he knows that without him, we are utterly lost. We need Jesus.

Not just to know about him. As any theologian knows about him. But I could line up for you a dozen theologians who know about Jesus but who don't know Jesus.

They don't know him. So, how does this come about? You see, we're actually born ignorant of God.

[11 : 03] We're born ignorant of God which is why Jesus says eternal life is knowing God. Jesus came that we might have eternal life which means that he's got to reverse that ignorance of God that keeps us from knowing him.

Jesus has to reverse our ignorance. And it's only through Jesus that we come to know God personally. So, how's that going to happen?

Jesus said to a very religious man actually, said to a very religious man he said, you know, you need to be born again. And the Bible allows us to say a very curious thing.

That if you're born twice you need only fear dying once. and then you'll live forever with the Lord. But if you're only born once you'll die twice because the Bible warns about a second death.

Now, I know there are aspects of what I'm saying today that are deeply discomforting to us. Deeply disturbing. Not the stuff we want to hear on a pleasant Sunday afternoon with the birds singing and a blue sky above us.

[12 : 22] But folks, if this is true then we need to know it's true and we dare not play fast and loose with the truth just because it's uncomfortable.

We need to know what we're going to do in eternity and where we're going to be and who we're going to be with. While we're going to be in this building today here we'll be here roughly an hour and a half all in I suppose.

About 10,000 people will die from this planet just in the period that we're in this church. And that's a lot of people dying in a very short time.

It's roughly about 600 people every five minutes. And they're all passing from this life into the next. You need to get this question right.

We need to know. Okay. So I'll switch this thing on so that Stephen doesn't have problems at the back there.

[13 : 31] When it comes down to eternal life it turns out that it's who you know after all. It's who you know. It really is. It's that simple.

It's who you know. This is eternal life says the Son of God that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. It's who you know. God has a red line and his red line is upside down to our way of thinking.

because Jesus told a parable about a man who hired people to work in his vineyard and he went out several times in the course of the day at different periods and he hired workers for the vineyard and he promised each one of them he said I'm going to pay you a denarius that was a day's wages for a labourer I'm going to pay you a denarius for the hours that you work.

So they signed up knowing what they were going to be paid at the end of the time. And then at the very last hour of the day when there was only one hour of working left before the sun went down he went out and he found some men standing about and he said what are you doing standing here?

Why are you all standing about? He said well nobody's hired us we've been looking for jobs and he said well come and work in my vineyard and at the end of this hour I'll pay you whatever is appropriate.

[15 : 02] He didn't say he would pay them a denarius he said he would pay them whatever was right. Well at the end of the time when it came time to pay the wages he started with the folks who had only worked for an hour and he gave them a denarius he paid them as though they had worked through the heat of the day like everybody else.

So all the guys behind them in the queue were thinking oh this is good this guy pays more than we're expecting. so they came up for their wages and each of them got a denarius as well and they grumbled about this and so the owner of the vineyard said what are you moaning about?

Have you been paid less than you were promised? Than you contracted for? Or does it upset you that I'm generous with my money and I give these people what they haven't earned?

Does it bother you that I'm generous? You see this is Jesus. So let's turn to Acts chapter 2 before we before we go any further I'm going to put this back a wee bit here.

Acts chapter 2 is a fascinating place in scripture if you if you get a chance when you go home today will you please turn to Acts chapter 2 and absorb what's happening here because it's really it's really quite amazing.

[16 : 38] Peter is addressing the crowd on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has come with the sound of a rushing mighty wind filled the whole place where they were sitting and tongues of fire spread out and appeared over the heads of the believers and they began to speak in languages they had never learned and now there were known languages they were the languages of all the crowd that had gathered now it was Passover time and Jerusalem was absolutely jam-packed with crowds of people and it must have been a riot of colour because they came from all over the known world at the time and they would all be wearing their finest clothes for the festival.

so here's this riot of colour and suddenly the disciples come running out of the temple and they all start speaking in these languages they have never learned and extolling the virtues of God and saying what a wonderful God he is and what great things he has done and all the rest and the people in the crowd are mystified they say hold on aren't these people Galileans I mean this is not the cream of your education here how did they learn these languages how are they able to tell us in languages that we can understand about the glories of God how are they able to do that and of course there are always some guys wise guys in the crowd who say well they're drunk and Peter stood up and says no they're not drunk it's only nine o'clock in the morning let me tell you this he says this is the fulfillment of a prophecy from Joel the prophet this is exactly what God said he would do in the last days he would pour out his spirit on all flesh and they would prophesy what are they doing they're prophesying they're telling the world anybody who wants to listen about the glories of their

God it's a wonderful moment but then Peter begins to preach and he starts talking to the crowd and this is the crowd you need to bear in mind because Jerusalem was thronged when Jesus was crucified a week before they had been thronging Jesus because they thought he was the Messiah and within a week they had changed their minds and decided he wasn't the Messiah and they cried for him to be crucified they were stirred up of course by the religious chief priests and people who were outright enemies of Jesus and so as a fickle crowd they suddenly changed their minds and started crying for his crucifixion and Peter stands up and he says to the crowd that by the deliberate plan and foreknowledge of God you conspired with wicked men to have his son crucified now excuse me but Peter's preaching the gospel here am I right

Peter's preaching the gospel and I still haven't heard them say Jesus loves you I haven't heard Peter say anything about the love of God for them he's actually saying to them you conspired with wicked men to murder the son of God that doesn't sound like good news to me and it certainly didn't sound like good news to the crowd but the Holy Spirit was powerful working through Peter and he brought conviction on that crowd and those people it says were cut to the heart Peter's words just cut right through and they fell to their knees brothers what are we to do what are we to do we've murdered God's son what hope is there for us that try and imagine that for a moment that must have been one of the most frightening things that could ever happen in anyone's life to realise that the man a week ago that you thought was a criminal and you cried out for his execution and suddenly here you are a week later and you're brought under conviction by the spirit of God that the man you thought was a criminal was actually the son of God and you are complicit in his murder well that's not good news not by any shakes but the amazing thing is that the good news follows on from this

Peter said Peter said to the crowd he said you need to understand that what is required of you now is that you repent and that you're baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth and hello they're to be baptised for their forgiveness in the name of the man they've just crucified wow how amazing is that do you see where God's red line falls you see we've got our own ideas of who is forgivable and who's not forgivable we could line up all the Nazis who perpetrated the holocaust and say no forgiveness for them couldn't we isn't it the same in the prisons don't the prisoners all have a pecking order of the guys who are the worst criminals and the worst who are most despised and they have their own idea of who's the goodies and who's the baddies but the reality folks is that

[22 : 35] God's red line is always drawn in a different place and as far as he's concerned there's only one sin that can't be forgiven and listen by the way I've been asked by this dozens of times and I'm sure that Bill and others who preach the gospel have been asked this many many times over the years people are always asking have I committed the unforgivable sin and I always say to them if you're worried that you have it's a sign that you haven't if you're worried that you've committed the unforgivable sin it's a clear sign that you haven't because you're saying there's a possibility it's God that's in the right and you're in the wrong the unforgivable sin doesn't allow you to say that but you know this is this is really quite amazing what's happening here if you and I were to line up the people we would say would be least likely to be forgiven by God what would it be wouldn't it be the crowd that had called for the death of his son a week before that not be the case

Jesus cried on the cross father forgive them for they know not what they do they cast lots for his garments and he was praying for the people who had just nailed him to the cross and one of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed and said so you're the messiah then are you prove it then by saving yourself and us well you're getting on with it why don't you but the other criminal protested because the other criminal had been a scoffer at nine o'clock in the morning he had joined in with the rest of the crowd all mocking Jesus but this is three o'clock in the afternoon and this criminal has watched Jesus he has seen Jesus forgiving his enemies he has seen Jesus providing for his old mother to be taken care of by one of the other disciples and he has known in his own heart that this man had done nothing wrong this is an innocent man being put to death whereas he says I'm getting what I deserve you mate are getting what you deserve but this man has done nothing wrong and then he turns to Jesus and he says

Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus replied I assure you today you will be with me in paradise do you see where God draws his red line do you know where it is it's not where you would draw it's not where I would draw it we would have loads of people written off and say they're beyond the pale they could never be forgiven and God offers forgiveness to the crowd that arranged the murder of his son and so what are they getting what is actually happening here each of you said Peter must repent of your sins turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins he's saying to the crowd of murderers you can be forgiven you can be forgiven and who will the forgiveness come from it will come from the judge whose son you murdered all the judge is looking for is for you to say this man on the cross was in the right and I was in the wrong

I'm the criminal here not him is this heady stuff I think it is I think it's amazing let's think for a moment about God's debt and you think to yourself how could God be in debt well you see God had a massive debt that needed cleared but it was ours it was ours and God took responsibility for your debt and mine here's Isaiah 53 this man of sorrows this saviour on the cross this crucified man was despised and rejected this was written by the way 700 years before the crucifixion he was despised and rejected a man of sorrows acquainted with deepest grief we turned our backs on him and we looked the other way he was despised and we did not care yet it was our weakness he carried it was our sorrows that weighed him down and we thought that his troubles were a punishment from

God a punishment for his own sins but he was pierced for our rebellion he was crushed for our sins he was beaten so that we could be whole he was whipped so that we could be healed all of us like sheep have strayed away yet we have let God's left God's paths to follow our own yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all you see that was God's debt God took your debt and mine and made it his own and paid for it with the blood of his own son the Lord laid on him the sins of all of us

[29 : 01] Jesus knew that his mission was finished says John and to fulfill scripture he said I'm thirsty now a jar of sour wine was sitting there so they soaked a sponge in it and this is actually funnily enough this is this is almost taken directly from Psalm 69 they soaked a sponge in it and they put this sour wine on a hyssop branch and they held it up to his lips and when Jesus had tasted it he said it is finished he wasn't talking about the wine he wasn't talking about himself he was talking about his mission everything he had come to do had been accomplished he had lived a sinless life for 33 years

I don't know about you but I find it hard to live sinless for 33 minutes and that's not a joke that's a serious matter for all of us sin is so endemic it's so natural to us our thoughts can change in a flash some flash of anger can come to us or some bad thought about someone else any number of things can pass through our minds in the course of a day but Jesus when he had finished it said it is finished then he bowed his head and released his spirit and at this point something is happening that we must not miss because when Jesus bowed his head and released his spirit that's the opposite way around from how people died on the cross normally their spirit left their body and then the head would flop and that was a sign that they were dead but in this case Jesus bows his head in reverence he's committed himself to the father he's committed his spirit to the father and he bows his head and then releases his spirit who is in control here didn't he say back in John 10 when he was talking about good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep he says no one takes my life from me I lay it down and

I have the power to take it up again and so he laid down his life he he's not having his life taken from him at this point he bows his head and then he releases his life spirit he's fully in control even of his own death what a saviour you know it's okay to shout hallelujah or something or give him a round of applause or something this is an amazing saviour that we have here it is finished and the word that he used came out of his mouth that they would all have heard was a greek word tetalestai and that word just that one word was normally written on your invoice when you had paid in full that's what he said paid in full what was paid in full god's debt that had been ours was paid in full there is nothing more to answer for the answer is Jesus Peter said an astonishing thing he has borne all our sins in his body on the tree notice the little word all there's nothing left out it's paid in full your debt my debt became god's debt and Jesus took it on himself the Lord has laid on him the sins of us all and god's debt is paid in full so that we don't have any isn't that wonderful so come to the father that's why Jesus came to bring us to the father and he told a story about a father who had two sons and we often talk about it as a parable of the prodigal son but actually they were both prodigals the sons there were two sons and they were both prodigals we think of a prodigal generally as somebody who runs away from his responsibilities who's totally reckless and a real wastrel a guy who just ruins everything a train wreck waiting to happen but you know if you look up the word prodigal in the dictionary you'll find it offers you synonyms that mean roughly the same thing and three of the most common words that you can use instead of prodigal is someone who's a waster or someone who is a wastrel or someone who is a squanderer let's let's just think about that for a wee minute because the older brother was as much of a waster as his younger brother but it's not so obvious you see in the story the younger brother he's a guy who's always itchy to be somewhere else he doesn't want to be in his father's house when he's when he's at his father's house he's not really there his mind and his heart are somewhere else preferably down the local drinking hole and he's a wine women and song kind of guy and that's that's the lifestyle he wants to lead and so he sees the fact that he's got this inheritance coming to him says to the father father I want my bit

I want my bit of the inheritance give me that and I'll be off I'll be out of your hair and he goes he can only imagine the heartbreak of the father and parents go through this kind of thing with their kids all the time so he goes off and he literally squanders everything and he ruins his life and when he's humiliated by his own foolish choices he gets to the point where he's so hungry he could eat what the pigs are eating and nobody will give him anything to eat and he finally comes to his senses and says I'm going to go back to my father even the servants at least I've got some food I'll ask my dad to take me on as a hired hand do you realise what this boy's problem is at its root this is the basic problem he's got is he's completely and utterly ignorant about his father he has no idea what his father's like and the proof of that is as he's going home he's trying to rehearse his little speech father

I'm no longer worthy to be called your son please just take me on as a hired hand and all the time he's rehearsing that little speech and thinking in that way what's he doing he's actually diminishing the father's love he doesn't know he's doing it because he's so ignorant of his father he's no idea that he's diminishing the father's love he's actually thinking that his father will quite happily make the switch from being a dad to being an employer and treat him like one of his employees he knows nothing about his dad absolutely nothing about him or he wouldn't even suggest to his father that horrible idea that he would cease to be a father and suddenly just become an employer what an insult so he's totally ignorant of his dad but then when the father sees him coming and the father's obviously been scanning the horizon maybe for however long it took for the boy to be away we don't know but the father's scanning the horizon and he sees the boy coming away in the distance and he throws all dignity to the winds because the one thing a father has never seen to do is to go running through the village like some wild teenager you know but he sees his son coming and he just throws dignity to the winds and off he goes and he catches his son in his arms and he embraces him and he jumps for joy and there's absolutely no dignity in it whatsoever but there's a lot of love because he's been watching for this boy for a long time and he knew when that son went off he knew he would ruin his life but he knew that there would come a time when he would have to come home and he had watched and waited for a long time and suddenly here's the boy and the father's overjoyed hey kill the fatted calf get the best robe in the house put it on him put a ring on his finger again he needs a ring because he sold it and it's the family ring he needs to know that he's part of this family again put shoes on his feet he's behaving like he's some kind of beggar or peasant put shoes on his feet let him be properly dressed and we're going to have a party boy are we going to have a party because this my son was dead and now he's alive again he was lost and now he's found and the father's joy is just overflowing and so they're having a party they're having a celebration and the older son comes in from the field and he says so what's all the noise oh well your brother's just come back and your father's overjoyed and he's thrown a party we're all celebrating it's just great news it's no great news to me and his father comes out of the party and says to the older brother come in join the celebration come in and he's so angry and he says says to the father ha

[39 : 42] I've slaved for you notice that word have a look in Luke 15 when you go home where the story of the prodigal son is look at that word and see what a waste that is of the father's love I have slaved for you all these years was he a blessed son was he a happy son no he wasn't everything he did was to try and buy the father's favor and he already had it he already had the father's favor now who does he represent I'll tell you who he represents he represents the religious sinner this was a guy who if there was a line to tow he would be the guy who towed the line if there was a fence to be respected he would respect that boundary and he wouldn't cross it if there was a social convention that everybody kept everybody happy he would not be the guy to rock the boat this was a guy who was respectable he was upright he was always up for the next moral medal to his to his chest he was a religious sinner who was just as ignorant of his father's love as the younger son just as ignorant so you see

John the apostle said this anyone who denies the son doesn't have the father either now we started at the beginning today looking at the whole idea of eternal life and Jesus definition that if we're going to have eternal life we need to know God and Jesus came that we might know God listen to what John is saying here anyone who denies the son doesn't have the father either but anyone who acknowledges the son has the father also so you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning if you do you will remain in fellowship with the son and with the father and in this fellowship we enjoy the eternal life he promised us and that's it folks that's how we have eternal life we have eternal life with the father through the son and if we have the son we have the father too you know this world that we live in is a giant orphanage it's a giant orphanage one of

Jesus disciples went to him once and said Lord show us the father that would be enough for us just show us the father and Jesus response is astonishing he says Philip Philip what you want to see is standing in front of you talking to you right now if you've seen me you've seen the father if you've seen me you've seen the father so folks how do we have fellowship with the father get to know Jesus better get to know Jesus better and father God will become as real to you as to Charles Spurgeon walking through the woods and suddenly dropping to his knees as naturally as telling a joke just dropping to his knees and saying oh let's just let's just say thank you to God come to

Jesus means come to the father if you hear preaching that says come to church ignore it because that's not the call that's not the call you could come to church for 20 years and still never know the father come to Jesus commit your life to him we're going to have a wee time of quiet right now and I would suggest please in your own heart if you haven't made peace with God don't put it off because we don't know if we've got the next five minutes make your peace with God right now let God know what the thief on the cross said that you know that you're the one in the wrong and Jesus is the one in the right let God come close to you right now the Bible gives you a wonderful promise draw near to him and he will draw near to you let's just be quiet for a few moments■■■