

Eternal Life

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[0 : 0 0] Bible, please open it up to John chapter 6. Some of you might be wondering, why are we still in John chapter 6? Well, Jesus has a lot to say in John chapter 6, and so we don't want to just rush past that too quickly. We want to take our time and listen to what Jesus is saying and really take it to heart. So let's remind ourselves of where we are in this conversation. Jesus is talking with a crowd of people, and many of this crowd were at the feeding of the 5,000 just yesterday, and this is quite the conversation. Jesus has urged them not to work for food that spoils, but for food that lasts. We heard Jesus tell them that God wants them to believe in the one that he has sent. We heard the crowd ask Jesus, do something amazing, do a sign, then we'll believe. Something like the miracle of the manna in the wilderness, maybe. We heard Jesus tell them that God is doing a similar kind of thing. Right now, he is giving you the true bread from heaven. We heard the crowd ask for this bread from heaven. And then we heard Jesus declare that he is the bread which

God has sent down from heaven. Last Sunday, we heard the crowd grumbling about Jesus claiming to be from heaven. It's a pretty lofty claim to make, to be from heaven. And this morning, we're going to look a little more closely at another lofty claim of Jesus, or we might say a lofty promise, an amazing offer that Jesus is making to people here in this conversation.

It all starts with Jesus' statement back up in verse 26 and 27. Very truly, he said, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

If there's two words that really stand out in that directive that Jesus gives to them, it's the words eternal life. We all know that ordinary food gives life. If you don't eat, eventually you will die. We need food to live. And so in a sense, food is life-giving.

And yet it seems as though Jesus is saying that there's a kind of food that is eternal life-giving. Like if you eat it, you will live forever.

[2 : 4 9] Now we don't know exactly what the people were thinking as they heard this. Perhaps some of them were thinking that that just sounds too good to be true.

That there's this kind of food that when you eat it, you will live forever. To many today, it might sound very much like the stuff of mythology. I was reading this week about some Japanese mythology where apparently there's a story of a girl who came across a mermaid-like creature and ate the meat of that creature and became immortal.

In both Greek and Norse mythology, it was believed that the gods and the goddesses, they were immortal. They could live forever because they were eating these golden apples or drinking this sweet drink called ambrosia.

Even the phrase eternal life for many today is probably a trigger in their minds. Like as soon as they hear those words, eternal life or immortality, we must be talking about fantasy or mythology or something in the latest Marvel movie or television series.

When's the last time you heard someone who doesn't believe in Jesus or frequent church gatherings use the phrase eternal life in everyday conversation?

- [4 : 20] Probably not recently. And so I wonder if even as we as Christians sometimes might hesitate to say those words outside the church circle, maybe you've thought about it or had that come up in conversation and maybe you felt that.
- You know, if I say the words eternal life to them, am I going to be losing some credibility or respect in their eyes? But Jesus did not shy away from using this phrase.
- In fact, we've already seen Jesus use this phrase a few times up to this point in the Gospel of John. He first spoke of eternal life that we know of to Nicodemus.
- To Nicodemus, you'll remember that he said, But as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.
- He spoke of obtaining eternal life to the Samaritan woman at the well. He said to her, Sometime later, when Jesus was in Jerusalem, back in John chapter 5, verse 24, we heard him saying to the religious leaders these words, Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but is crossed over from death to life.
- [6 : 01] So Jesus has already been speaking about eternal life, and he's been speaking of it as something that's very much attainable. He's not telling fantasy stories here, or talking about some ancient legend of somebody who ate or drank this or that and then suddenly became immortal.
- No, he speaks about eternal life as if it's real, attainable, and not just for those rare few who happen to stumble upon the secret, but for anyone, for all who will believe.
- To Nicodemus, So the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.
- To the religious leaders, Whoever hears my word and believes has eternal life. Whoever. And now to the crowd that he's talking with, he makes it clear that eternal life is not just for one group of people.
- It's not just for that one fortunate person who happens to stumble into that hidden cave and find this secret chalice with this nectar of the gods in it. No. Chapter 6, verse 3, For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.
- [7 : 25] Eternal life is for anyone who will believe. It's for the world. On the lips of Jesus, eternal life is no fairy tale. It's no legend.
- It's no fantasy. It's a real, attainable thing for all who hear the words of Jesus and believe. Those who truly believe him. It's quite a thing, as you think about it, to look someone in the eye and offer them eternal life.
- And let's not miss where this eternal life comes from. Jesus told the religious leaders back in chapter 5, verse 21, For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son, this is Jesus referring to himself, the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.
- So Jesus is not just someone who knows the secret way to eternal life. He himself is claiming to be the one who gives eternal life to people.
- That's the way Jesus has talked throughout this gospel. It's Jesus that must be lifted up, as we just read, so that whoever believes might have eternal life.
- [8 : 46] It's Jesus who offers the woman at the well living water, which he says he has to give to her, which will result in eternal life. In this very conversation with the crowd here, Jesus tells them where the food that lasts to eternal life comes from.
- He says, which the Son of Man will give you. The very plain sense of all these is that Jesus is saying, you get eternal life from me.

He's not just a spiritual guru who has found the way to become immortal. He himself has the power and the authority of God to give eternal life to people.

And this is a big part of what this whole conversation about the bread of life is about. Just like you live a little longer by eating this ordinary earthly bread, Jesus has been saying in the same way, you can live forever by eating the special heavenly bread, the bread that God has given from heaven.

And then we heard a couple weeks back as Jesus said it plain as day, I myself am the bread of life. In other words, eternal life doesn't just come from me as something external that I carry outside myself and give away to people.

[10 : 18] No. Eternal life comes through me and in me. Let's listen to the words of Jesus in verse 47.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Now next Sunday, we'll find out how the crowd responded to these words. But for this morning, I want to focus on this offer of Jesus, this gift of Jesus, eternal life.

[11 : 31] Jesus has one more thing to say to make it clear what this eternal life refers to. In mythology and legends about immortality, you probably know how the story goes.

There's some character who eats or drinks something or does something special that causes them to become immortal, to live forever. and generally, they are, from that point on, unable to die.

It makes for some great fiction. It makes for some good movie plots as someone tries to go after that character who's immortal with whatever weapon they have only to find out that they simply cannot kill him.

He's immortal. He's unable to die. It makes for some entertaining stories as we think of, you know, kind of the fantastic notion that some one person who has found this secret could have lived for centuries.

They were there, that one character in the story, and fought as a young man in the First World War and they were there, a young man also, back in the days of Napoleon and then they're still here today in present day but nobody really knows their secret.

[12 : 51] Is this the kind of eternal life that Jesus is talking about? I think we all know the answer. It's not. He's not saying that we will never physically die here on earth kind of eternal life.

Let's hear it from Jesus in his own words. John chapter 6 verse 38. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all those he has given me. And then here it is. But raise them up at the last day.

That's the key phrase. But raise them up at the last day. I'm not saying that I'm here to give you immortality in your physical body right here right now such that you'll never die.

No. The eternal life that I give when it comes to your body happens when I raise you up from the dead at the last day.

[14 : 03] And let's not move too quickly from this statement. Jesus wants us to hear these words. And we know this because he says this exact phrase almost word for word four times in this conversation.

I will raise them up at the last day. He says it in verse 40 again. For my father's will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life.

And I will raise them up at the last day. He says it in verse 44. No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws them and I will raise them up at the last day.

And he says it again in verse 54. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. We'll talk about that next Sunday. I know that probably tweaks some of you.

and I will raise them up at the last day. Four times he says it. I will raise them up at the last day. Which kind of brings us to this question.

[15 : 13] So when does eternal life begin? There's a sense in which eternal life begins now when we believe in Jesus because our status with God changes when we believe in Jesus.

Our eternal destiny changes from death to life. In the words of Jesus we have crossed over from death to life. There's a spiritual element to it here and now.

We come alive to God where we were dead to him before. God's spirit of life comes to live inside of us and joins us to Jesus himself so that we become one with Christ.

We are in him. So there is a here and now aspect to eternal life. We could say in a very real sense that eternal life begins the moment that you truly believe in Jesus and are born again by the spirit of God.

But there's also a very real sense in which eternal life does not begin fully until the last day when Jesus returns and raises us up from the dead to live forevermore never to die again.

[16 : 39] I will raise them up at the last day those who believe whoever believes in me. so what's the significance of this?

I think it's important because we need to know that this good gift of eternal life is something that we can receive today in the present even as Jesus is speaking the words to people will they believe today?

but the full glory of course of this gift awaits the last day when Jesus returns and as I was thinking about it this week I was imagining it like the gift of a brand new car from a father to his 13 year old son at Christmas.

Can you imagine the delight on his face as he opens up a little box and inside are a set of keys to a brand new car that's now he's discovered is parked in the family garage and this gift doesn't come with any strings attached it's not his dad's or mom's to drive until he's old enough to drive it it's his it belongs to him he may have to wait until a future day when he's able to reach the pedals or a future day when he gets his driver's license to fully enjoy this gift but it belongs to him now and one day he will have the pleasure of backing it out of the garage and taking it for a spin for the first time eternal life is a gift like that a gift that we can receive today by believing in Jesus and yet a gift that we won't fully enjoy until the last day when Jesus comes and raises us up from the grave with the rest of our time this morning

I want us to think about those words eternal life I've said them a lot we've probably heard them a lot as Christians even before this morning what do they mean life without end life that goes on forever life of infinite length days without number never to die again after the resurrection we could say it in a number of ways but so often I think as we hear those words eternal life it just kind of passes through our heads and doesn't really land in our hearts so how long is eternal how long is forever if life is eternal after we are raised up at the last day when will our bodies or our organs fail if life is eternal after the last day when will our ears stop hearing properly or our eyes stop seeing clearly or our joints wear out if life is eternal when will our hearts finally beat the last beat just give up because they've had too much mileage put on them if life is eternal when will we hear the number of days that we have left from the doctor because of sickness or disease cancer injury how long is forever there are some benefit for our imaginations to reading those fanciful stories about people who lived for a thousand years it gets us thinking what would it be like to live for a thousand years of unbroken life to love to have all kinds of family and friendships for a thousand years uninterrupted to grow in wisdom to learn new things year after year for a thousand years can you imagine that to have a life so full as the men did when the world was first created now take that and think about this how about ten thousand years can you imagine what it would be like to live for ten thousand years what it would have been like to live from the dawn of this world's creation up until this present day all in one continued span of life can you imagine that after ten thousand years you're still as young and strong and able as you were at the beginning can you imagine having all the time in the world to do all those good things that you otherwise just wouldn't get to do to read all those books to play to learn to play that instrument and become fully expressive in it and master it and in fact why just one instrument how about nine or ten a thousand years is plenty of time to master a whole bunch of them can you imagine what it would be like to live for ten thousand years of unbroken life and then when you come to the end of that to find out that you will live that span that length over and over and over again without end without aging as we know it without the body or the mind growing weak or frail or weary as time goes on without sickness without disease without

[22 : 41] death how long is forever I know some of you have been wondering what this string is all about this string every inch on it represents a hundred years and so if we start at the creation of the world by the most conservative accounts years you know we go along and we get to about here there's six thousand years that's kind of the most conservative estimate from Christians as to the age of the world but then some people have issue with the you know the gaps and the genealogies and stuff so let's add another four thousand years just for fun let's say that this is this is how long since the creation of the world till now there's your life right there a little blip I colored it red but you probably can't see it from here if you make it to a hundred years that's your life at some time a little bit down the line we don't know exactly when the day or the hour will be the last day that Jesus is talking about there when he will raise us up and then starts the full sense of eternal life and it goes on and it goes on and it goes on can you imagine living this full length of life that we know here over and over and over again this string the other end of it is out by the alley on the sidewalk outside the front doors of the church down by the alley represents a total of about 330,000 years about 3,000 ish of lifetimes of 100 years but in reality there will be no end to that string it will just keep on going all the way around the world again and again and again forever forever that's how long eternal life is that's the kind of life that Jesus is offering to you and to me as an undeserved gift of grace and if that's what's in store for those who believe in

Jesus then suddenly it makes a lot of sense when Jesus says do not work for food that spoils but for food which lasts unto eternal life don't spend all of your life so focused in everything you do on this when there's all of this store up treasure in heaven not on earth for this little blip here but for all of this seek first his kingdom said Jesus and when it comes it's going to last forever don't worry about what you need in life your food your clothing all that stuff God's going to look after that and take care of you eternal life John Newton had it right when he penned those famous words when we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun we've no less days to sing

God's praise than when we'd first begun let's pray father in heaven even just to think about the magnitude of that gift blows us away we're not worthy of that we don't deserve that we hear the words that you spoke to our great ancestor the day you eat of it you shall surely die what mercy and what grace you've given us I pray and ask that all of us would believe that we would hear the words you are speaking and that we would receive and believe eternal life in Jesus name amen ■ to sorrir■ desse■■■

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