

I Believe in the Life Eternal

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[0 : 00] I believe in the life eternal. The best way to get a message across is through a story. That's why sermons are meant to contain stories and illustrations, and that's why stories are one of the best methods to help our children learn. Now, the Apostles' Creed may seem anything but a story. It seems more like a list of things we must believe as Christians. But it is a story for no other reason than it tells us the story about time and about God. And as all great stories do, it has a great conclusion which ties all the strands of the story together and gives them their ultimate meaning. In our case, the conclusion of the story is contained in the words, in the life eternal. But before we get to that conclusion, let's quickly reveal what this story tells us about time and about God, this being our last study in the Apostles' Creed.

In the first instance, the Apostles' Creed speaks to us about the past, the present, and the future. The things which are, the things which were, and the things which are yet to be. It talks of God's past creation of all things, of Christ's life, his death, his resurrection. It talks of God's present work in his forgiveness of sin and bringing his people together as one holy Catholic church. And it talks of God's future work in the second coming of Christ from heaven, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. So the Creed covers all of universal history from beginning to end. But in the second instance, the Apostles' Creed is also deeply Trinitarian. It tells us about God. It describes to us the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Godhead. The first section of the Creed talks of the work of God the Father, maker of heaven and earth. The second section of the Creed talks of the work of God the Son, suffering, dying, rising, ascending, coming again, judging. The third section of the Creed talks of the work of God the Holy Spirit, uniting all the saints, applying to us the forgiveness of sin, and raising us up on the last day.

The Creed tells us everything we need to know about God. But it's the last line of the Apostles' Creed where everything has been heading to. It is both the conclusion and the climax. It's the exciting summary of where the past, the present, and the future are fulfilled. It is the climax of what God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been doing. It is the reason for the creative work of God the Father, the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the applying work of the Holy Spirit. And it reads just these few words, in the life everlasting. God created, God saved, and God is applying the work of the Holy Spirit. It's all about this eternal life for all who trust in Him, and for whom the faith of the Apostles' Creed is their faith also. This is what it all needs. It's the climax, the fulfillment of the fulfillment of the whole creed, that all who have the courage to say, I believe, have, and will have everlasting life. This is where all universal history has been heading, that sinful men and women like us might have eternal life. Isn't that the most amazing thing when we think about it this way?

[4 : 34] The eternal life of all who believe in Christ is the high point of all that God has been doing in our world. Yes, even since before creation. But what is eternal life? What is eternal life? We all have images in our minds of cherubs sitting on clouds, plucking harp strings. It is most definitely not that.

Jesus tells us what eternal life is in John chapter 17 and verse 3. This is page 903. John 17 and verse 3.

Where in His high priestly prayer, He prays to His Father and He says, eternal life. Eternal life consists in knowing God. This is the entire reason for everything God has done in creation, redemption, and application. The reasons for the sufferings, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ, the reason for the forgiveness of sin, and the existence of the church, so that we sinful men and women may know God.

Now, know, in this sense, does not refer to the quantity of our knowledge about God. It refers to the quality of our relationship with God.

The quality of our relationship with God. Knowing God. Eternal life is about knowing God as He is. And enjoying the deepest joy and closeness of relationship with the God who is so gloriously delightful, beautiful, and full of light.

[6 : 37] Can there be a greater hope for any of us? That we shall enjoy the fullness of the quality of that relationship with the God that we have worshipped, served, and in whom we have trusted all these years.

Eternal life isn't just something we wait for, because Jesus says to us, even in a verse such as John 3 16, that it's ours now, through faith in Him.

For God so loved the world that He gave us one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. Eternal life, knowing God as He is, and enjoying Him as He is, began in us the moment we believed in Jesus.

But it shall grow and grow in us until, having died and gone to be with Him in the new heavens and the new earth, we shall enjoy it in the fullness of its joy and its peace.

And you know, we could talk about this all night and beyond. And we can dream about what it will mean for us. We do not think, I believe, enough of the life eternal as it began in us the moment we first believed and shall be fulfilled with God.

[7 : 59] But to focus our minds down for a few moments on this glorious hope of eternal life, I want us to think of what it shall mean in terms of our relationship with each person of the Trinity under the headings of life in the Spirit, life in the Son, and life in the Father.

There's just so many mysteries attached to what the new heavens and the new earth shall be like. But we do not need to think of these mysteries to be filled with the joy and hope of eternal life.

All we need to focus on is that it will consist in knowing God in the joy and closeness of His delight, beauty, and light.

First of all then, we have life in the Spirit, eternal life in the Spirit. In John chapter 14, verse 16, in His upper room discourse, Jesus said to His disciples, And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.

On the day we first believed, God sent His Holy Spirit to live within us, to make His home in our hearts. And from what Jesus says in this verse, the Holy Spirit will never leave us.

[9 : 32] He will be with us, and He will be in us forever. All the way through our lives, here and now, the Holy Spirit is with us, and He's in us. He's helping us, and He's strengthening us.

In our darkest times, He gives us the light of Christ in our hearts. In our weakest times, He gives us the strength of Christ in our wills. In our most anxious times, He gives us the certainty of Christ in our minds.

And in our most lonely times, He gives us the presence of Christ in our spirits. Hundreds of years ago, a famous Scottish preacher called Henry Scougall called what the Spirit gives us, the life of God in the soul of man.

The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, the Christ who even now is at the right hand of God the Father. When in the next chapter, John 15, Jesus talked of His being the vine and we the branches, the Holy Spirit is the life-giving sap which joins us to Him.

All things shall change, but this shall never change. Eternal life means that the Holy Spirit will always be in us, and will always be with us.

[10 : 52] Here and now on this earth, there and then in the new heavens and the new earth, He will never leave us because it's in Him and through Him we enjoy the life of God in the soul of man.

Whenever we experience God's presence with us, it's the Holy Spirit who's bringing Him close to us. Whenever we get a new view of the glory of Jesus, it's the Holy Spirit who is bringing Him into our minds and hearts.

Whatever wonderful things we know about God here and now, whatever wonderful experiences we have of Him here and now, will be multiplied exponentially there and then. The pains of our distance from God will entirely disappear.

All the things that got between us and Him, they'll all be a thing of the past, and the glorious pleasures of our closeness to God will increase abundantly. What we've known only in whispers here, He shall make known loudly there, and it's in Him and through Him we shall enjoy and experience the glories of God forever.

It shall be in Him and through Him we shall know God as He is and see Christ face to face. O blessed Spirit of God, who has been working all these years, You shall amplify the praises of our

hearts in heaven and reveal to us God in all His glory of the majesty of His love.

[12:28] Life in the Spirit. But secondly, life in the Son. Life in the Son. In John chapter 10 and verse 10, Jesus says, I have come that they, those who believe in Him, may have life and have it abundantly.

And then in John chapter 17, verse 25, Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me, he shall never die.

Life and Jesus belong together. In Him is life. Now we've learned through successive weeks of working our way through the Apostles' Creed, how it is that through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, we have new life in Him, that He died for us and rose on the third day to give us this abundant life.

And yet there is so much we do not know about how we shall relate to Jesus when we go to be with Him. One thing we do know, He will not delegate the responsibility of welcoming us to heaven to anyone else but Himself.

He Himself is waiting for us there to welcome us home. But as we survey the New Testament, there are at least three things which are clear, even if many of the details remain hazy.

[14:05] Seeing Jesus, being like Jesus, and following Jesus. Seeing Jesus, first of all. In 1 John 3, verse 3, we read these words, We shall see Him as He is.

We shall see Him as He is. With these eyes of ours, the eyes He gave us, we shall see Him face to face. All these confusing questions we had about what He looked like and shall look like will be answered.

In 1 Peter 1, verse 18, we read, Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not see Him now, now you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that's inexpressible.

But on that day, and throughout the long ages of eternal life, we shall see Him as He is. What will He be like?

Will we see the Jesus pictured in Revelation 1 as being gloriously transformed, His face shining like the sun in all its glory? Will we see Him as He is pictured in Revelation 5 as the Lamb who has been slain and the Lion of the tribe of Judah?

[15:24] Or will we see the Jesus who became incarnate with the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and risen on the third day?

Will we see the marks of the nail in His hands and the thorns in His brow? Shall He greet us with arms outstretched as they were upon the cross?

Or with His hand raised to us, saying, Peace be unto you? We do not know. But one thing we do know is that when we look into His eyes, we shall see the infinite depth of His love for us, shining like two glorious diamonds and our hearts will explode with joy.

We shall see the risen and exalted Jesus. When we're in the depths of despair here, fill yourself with that never-dying hope.

We shall see Him, and we shall be like Him. Secondly, being like Jesus. Again in that verse, 1 John 3, verse 3, we read these words, when He appears, we shall be like Him.

[16:38] We shall be like Him. Many of us struggle with self-image and self-esteem. It's been maybe even worse for the younger generation through the influence of social media. We wish we were different.

We wish we were better than we are. As Christians, our goal in life, is it not, is to be more like Jesus in the way we think and speak and act. The Holy Spirit helps us with this.

Helps us to get rid of sin in our lives and to strive after grace and holiness of life. But still we're frustrated. A frustration echoed by the Apostle Paul when he said, O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?

The wonderful truth is, a day will come when we shall be like Jesus. There's just so much mystery involved in what this shall be like, but it's most certainly what the Apostle Paul was pointing to in Romans 8 when he talks about us being conformed to the image of the Son of God.

There shall be no sin and no shame and no guilt. There shall only be perfect purity and holiness and righteousness. The angels shall look upon us with amazement as the sinners they once saw degraded into ruin shall be transformed into the glory of their divine Master Jesus.

[18:03] We shall be like Him in the way we think, in the way we speak, in the way we act. No more self-esteem issues in heaven. For as we look at ourselves in a mirror, if there are such things

in heaven at all, we will only see the glory of Jesus saving love.

We shall be like Him. And thirdly, following Jesus. We shall follow Jesus. Revelation 9 verses 15 through 17, we read these words together, there are some of the most beautiful words in human language that record for us the glorious blessings of those for whom Jesus, those whom Jesus has saved from their sins and washed white in His blood.

In particular, what's written in verse 17 is very striking. It reads this way, the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water.

Now we love the language of Psalm 23 and how it talks of the Lord, our shepherd, lovingly and wisely guiding us through life, being with us in the valley of the shadow of death and assuring us that goodness and mercy shall be with us all the days of our lives.

But now in heaven we find ourselves with something even more indescribably beautiful than the Lamb of God, the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, He's our shepherd and He'll guide us to springs of living water.

[19 : 45] We've followed Him our whole lives through but often found ourselves dry and parched by life's hard circumstances, by the griefs and hardships of living in a sin-broken world.

But there, when time shall be no more, there shall only be the sweetness and the vibrancy of these springs of living water.

We follow Jesus our whole lives through and never once has He failed us. And in eternal life we shall follow Him again and again and He'll continue to lead us marvelously to these springs of living water where we'll drink of the life of God forever.

like our shepherd. Our Master will lead us there and will joyfully follow Him. We follow Jesus here and now.

We'll follow Him forever. Here then is the story of our redemption. Eternal life with Jesus face to face where we shall see Him, be like Him and be eternally led by Him.

[20 : 56] There could be no greater vision of the hope and glory with which to fill our tired minds and hearts than this. That our futures as Christians they're not uncertain.

Our future is eternal life with Jesus Christ. The Lamb who was slain for us. The Lion who reigns for us. The Shepherd who loves us.

Life in the Spirit. Life in the Son. And finally life in the Father. Life in the Father.

The story of the Bible begins in the garden where human beings met with God and lived with God. The tragedy of our history as human beings is that because of our sin we experience separation and alienation from God.

But time and again in the Bible God makes His symbolic dwelling with us again. In the tabernacle in the wilderness. In the temple in Jerusalem.

[22 : 06] In the church of the living God. And most of all in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. And God's purpose in the whole Bible is in a sense to return us to the beginning.

Where we live with Him and He lives with us. After all in the language of John 17 3 that eternal life consists in knowing God.

How shall we know Him unless we are with Him and He is with us? In Revelation 21 we learn about the new heavens and the new earth in which we shall live.

we read in verse 3 of that chapter Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will be with them as their God.

The Apostle Paul he speaks the same language when talking in 1 Thessalonians 4 17 about what shall happen when Christ returns. He says we shall be with the Lord forever.

[23 : 18] Eternal life in the Father shall consist in this. He shall be with us and we shall be with Him. There shall no longer be any separation between us anything to get in the way of our relationship with Him just the beauty of the glory of His presence.

and the more we are with Him the more we'll want to be with Him everything will be fulfilled and there shall be nothing left but to internally enjoy Him.

We shall be with Him and we shall praise Him with new voices perhaps with words we have sung many times before but with new meaning and with new joy.

There's one more thing I want to say about this before moving on to our conclusion. On two occasions in Revelation 7 17 and Revelation 21 verse 4 our Heavenly Father God the Father is described as doing something indescribably beautiful.

He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. All the tears you've ever shed whether on the outside or whether on the inside like the tender loving Father that He is He'll wipe them all away.

[24 : 55] So beautifully emotional and poignant which one of us isn't looking forward to the end of all our tears. Well this is the story of the Apostles' Creed.

This is what it's all been leading to. All the drama of creation. All the suffering of redemption. All the beauty of application. This is its fulfillment. That we may know God even as He knows us.

But let me apply this in two final ways. first of all the alternative to eternal life is eternal death.

The alternative to eternal life is eternal death. Now none of us surely want that when all we've talked about tonight is the beauty of eternal life.

What must we do then to have eternal life? believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Accept the confession of faith as your confession.

[26 : 00] I believe. Well we do that right here and right now so that forever we shall be with the Lord. Lord. And secondly what is all this story and teaching but that it gives us certain and unshakable hope when all the world's going crazy and we cannot even trust ourselves to know what's up and what's down.

When our tears are freely flowing and we don't think we can keep on going take heart for this eternal life lies before you. do not give up for better days than these are coming.

Without this hope we'll have all men most miserable but with it our future is secure and certain. Oh blessed people of hope in Christ we believe in the life everlasting with the Spirit with the Son and with the Father.

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