

Eternal Life - Defined by Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 July 2015

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to John 17, where we read a few minutes ago. Let's read again from the beginning. I'm going to look especially at the words of verse 3, but we'll need to take some of the words previous to that with us as well.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. It's such a significant thing, when you read in the Gospels, of how Jesus prayed at specific times, though we understand that he prayed constantly.

How he prayed at specific times during his ministry. It's a remarkable thing itself, to see the Son of God, having come to take out human nature, being dependent on his Father, on the Holy Spirit, and even on the Word of God in the Old Testament, as he then had it.

It's a remarkable thing, to think of the Son of God praying to God the Father. It's remarkable, because it brings to us that there are relationships within the Trinity, that God is, that we have such a little understanding of, compared to all that is true of that.

[1 : 40] It's remarkable, too, because you don't expect God to actually come into a position where he himself prays. But this is God, it's not just a human being, it's not just the human nature of Christ.

It is the Son of God in our human nature, that came into these circumstances where he prayed, where he expressed dependence upon his Father.

And it's significant, not just that you see Jesus praying at different times in the Gospels, it's significant that he prayed at this moment in his experience. This is such an important moment.

This is Christ's point. This, as we'll see, is the point towards, really, which the whole of his experience, up to now, has been running.

This hour that he mentions, that has now come. And he meets the need of that hour in prayer. And not only does he come to pray for himself, but the other remarkable thing that you notice, as you read through this prayer, as it's recorded here in John 17, is while he begins with prayer about himself and for himself, he very quickly moves on to praying for the disciples, and then even in a wider circle, to pray for all who will believe through their word.

[3 : 10] In other words, he's coming to pray for his entire church in the whole span of time, right through to the end of the world. At this specific point, when his own crisis, his own death on the cross, looms large in his experience.

So many remarkable things packed into so few words. But what I want to do is look especially at how he defines for us eternal life in verse 3.

And it comes to that by a number of other things that are mentioned. Let's look at the precise timing in more detail. And look at, briefly, the petition itself, where he asks, Father, glorify your Son.

But then we'll see that that petition develops into the purpose for which he is praying that for himself, which really brings in the way in which eternal life is what he has in mind for his people, and that he brings that before his Father as something that he himself, that God, that Jesus himself is going to bestow upon his people.

In other words, he's saying, glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, but so that you will be glorified, Father, through the eternal life that I am giving to them.

[4 : 36] That's the gist of his prayer. That's a petition. That's its purpose. And this is its precise timing, first of all. He says, Father, as he lifts up his eyes to heaven, Father, he says, the hour has come.

And we're not going to go into all the words or all the phrases that are used there. It is significant, of course, that he uses the word Father. It was Jesus who brought that word before us in his own praying.

It was something that had not been used of God until Jesus came to use it publicly in his own and privately in his own use of it. It brings before us the wonderful familiarity, the child-father relationship that exists between God and his people, that existed even between the Son of God and God the Father, as expressed through this word Father.

And he says, as he lifts up his eyes to heaven. That itself is an important expression, isn't it? It's included there so that we can understand Jesus in the presence of the disciples, lifting up his eyes to heaven as he begins the prayer, and therefore making it obvious to them that his focus is there. His focus is not on earth, but actually in heaven. His focus is on heaven where the Father is. His focus is on heaven where he himself will return to. His focus is on heaven where his people will be with him eventually.

[6 : 05] He lifted up his eyes to heaven. Great start to our days, isn't it, if we follow his example. And we'll see that there are things here not just for our benefit through his ministry for us, but there are things here for our example as well that he's setting out for us as the way by which we also should live in our relationship with God.

We lift up our eyes to heaven. Why has he given us the Lord's day? So that we can lift up our eyes to heaven. Why has he given us the many advantages we have?

So that we can lift up our eyes to heaven in thanksgiving. Why has he given us circumstances in life over which we are anxious? So that we can lift our eyes up to heaven to seek his help. Whether it's things to praise him for, things to petition him for, we do it by lifting up our eyes to heaven.

Why has he placed us in an environment in the world that is so full of secularist and humanist and timely things, things that are bounded and confined to the things of time and the things of sense and the things of human thought, so that we can lift our eyes beyond them, so that we can see that our life as Christians is not set in this world but is directed by heaven and directed to heaven.

Make this day, friends, a day when you lift up your eyes to heaven. When you bring all that this day and all that this unfolding week, God willing, will bring to you, that you'll bring it into the compass of following Jesus, lifting up your eyes to heaven.

[7 : 47] And he says the hour has come. Now if you go to the likes of chapter 8, verse 20, and other verses also in John's gospel a number of times, in these circumstances, Jesus mentioned specifically that my hour has not yet come.

In other words, Jesus was conscious of this hour, as he calls it, all the way through his ministry. Certainly when he began this ministry in the public sense, he began referring to this hour.

And all the way up to now, he's been saying, my hour has not yet come. And now he's saying, Father, the hour has come. This is the hour of Jesus' death, the hour of the cross, and the things that are immediately preceding that.

That's the hour. That's the hour of the crisis. The crisis in the life of Jesus, the Son of God in our nature. That hour that is so vital for himself and for his people. And it's come.

And he's conscious that it's come. Our Savior here before the Lord, before God the Father, and before the disciples, is making it clear to them that he has reached the point where he must now consecrate himself to death for their benefit.

[9 : 03] And he wants them to know it. And to know it so that they, as they reflect on this in later life, will think back to this momentous hour, will think back to this crisis in the life of the Lord, and say, this is where my hope is set.

This is where every crisis in my life must be brought and laid before him and built upon the crisis that he himself gave to experience.

Father, the hour has come. In other words, you take from that. We said there are a number of lessons to take from this because here we have an example. And this is one of them where you find that even for Jesus, even for the Son of God, this perfect Son of God, even for him, his commitment to suffering and his commitment to the death of the cross was not an automatic thing.

He didn't just do it at the beginning of his public ministry and that was it. For every day afterwards, all he needed to do was think back to, well, I consecrated myself at the beginning of my public ministry to it and that's all I need to do.

He was doing it every day. He needed to do it every day. Though that's itself saying something profound, yes, but the Son of God actually came in our nature in dependence on God the Father,

on the Holy Spirit, on the Word of God.

[10:29] He came daily and more than once a day to consecrate himself to God. In other words, as you see Jesus going through with the issues of his life in this world, he approaches every step in that by consecrating himself actively, willingly, positively, newly.

And there's our example. Is that how we began this day? Is that how we begin every day? Because here's our example, friends, that Jesus, if it was so for Jesus that he consecrated himself to every step as it unfolded of his life, day by day, hour by hour, surely that means for us that the least expected of us is that we do the same.

that we begin the day each day with consecration to God doesn't have to take long. It's to be a positive commitment to him of our life for this day and for this hour and for this crisis and for this need, whatever it might be.

And the Lord will see to it that when we do that, as he did at every step, this is, you see, a new act of obedience and that's what's important about it, isn't it?

When we consecrate ourselves to God at every time we do that, what we're really saying to God is, Lord, I am willingly again and positively committing my way to you.

[12:08] This is a new act of obedience on the part of Jesus following every act of obedience up to that point. And so it is just somewhat similar in a way to the way the people of Israel had to gather their manna every morning except on the morning of the Sabbath when the previous day they needed to do it in double measure.

But for us, we go out to gather the strength that we need by a fresh consecrating of ourselves to God. I don't do it perfectly. You don't do it perfectly.

But this is our standard. This is our pattern. This is what we aspire to. This is what we'd like to be. This is what we really would ourselves want to be more like.

And the Lord in consecrating himself, just think of what he's doing here. He's not just doing it for his own benefit. He's doing it for the benefit of his people if he went to the lengths of so frequently consecrating himself for your sake and for my sake.

Surely the least we can do in dependence upon them is to come to him every day and say, Lord, with a new act of obedience, I'm here to consecrate myself to you. Help me to do it more perfectly today than I did it yesterday.

[13:28] And here's our opportunity today. This Lord's day. This time when we have more time to devote to God, let's consecrate our life to him today.

Because we know the rest of this week is going to be busier than today will be usually. But let's do it daily so that we can come to follow the pattern our Lord has set us.

Because that's where our strength is. Yesterday's consecration of ourselves is not enough for today's crisis, for today's needs. We need to come today for today's needs.

And it is, as we said, for their sake. You find that more accurately and more detailed in verse 19. For their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth.

And he has the disciples' needs in mind when he came to this moment in his own life. And what a wonderful amount of comfort and encouragement there is in that for all who've come to trust in the Lord.

[14:37] And for all of us today as we trust in the Lord with our own personal crisis, whatever it might be, with the things in our own life as God has put them together in his providence, you bring all of that to this and say, for their sakes, Jesus is saying, I am consecrating myself.

In other words, everything within the space of our life, and this is including, of course, the mission of the church as well because he talks there of the disciples as those he's sending into the world as the Father sent him into the world.

So here we are today with our lives personally, our lives individually, our life together as a congregation, our life as a church, our life in terms of the mission of our church, of that church we are as we seek to engage with the world outside there in the gospel for Christ.

What's this saying to us? It's saying that all of that, with all our anxieties and all our questions and all our needs and everything that we see of ourselves and of the difficulties of reaching out into the world, it's all already inside the consecration with which Jesus consecrated himself to the Father.

we are already securely within and secure within Christ's consecration of himself to the Father. He took account of all his people in all their needs as he said, for their sakes I'm sanctifying myself.

[16:16] Doesn't mean that we don't have our responsibilities, our own personal development, our own contribution to the gospel, but this is hugely encouraging that when we feel disappointment, when we think things are not going as they should be or as we'd like them to be, we remember, well, Jesus knew that when he prayed.

All our work, all our personal development, it's all in here already. It's all inside this prayer of Jesus, this remembrance of Jesus, this provision of Jesus for the sake of his people.

When you feel downcast, when you feel discouraged, surely your greatest pick up is to remember that Christ has remembered you long before you were ever born and remembered your specific circumstances before you ever came to be.

that's the amazing thing. It's for their sakes. It's with regard to their development that he came to consecrate himself.

That's the precise timing. Now, there's the petition. When he spoke these words, he said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.

[17:45] Now, you notice where Jesus begins. He doesn't begin with saying, Father, glorify your Son and leave it at that. He begins, Father, glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you.

But this is where he starts off by saying, glorify your Son. Now, glorify really means essentially to bestow the highest honor upon someone.

and when you think of glorifying God, which is what we were created to do, it means essentially the same thing, that we bring the highest honor to God that we are capable of.

We bestow honor upon God. We actually ascribe glory and praise and honor. But for Jesus, it actually was more than that. For Jesus to be glorified by God the Father, which is what he's asking for here, glorify your Son, actually meant a return or a reinstatement to the glory that he always had with the Father in verse 5 before the world existed.

That too is a remarkable thing. Here is Jesus conscious of where he came from. In other words, he didn't really have a beginning as a person.

[19:02] He had a beginning as a human, but not as a person because as a person he is the person of the Son of God. And what he's saying is all that he left behind, if you like, he didn't leave his personhood behind, he didn't leave his deity behind, he didn't leave all that makes him God behind, but he left his glory, he left the manifestation of his glory, he left things in that sense behind when he became a servant.

And now he's seeking the reinstatement of that subsequent to his time on earth being finished. Father, glorify your Son.

Glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world existed. Are you humbled today?

Am I humbled? God, at the very thought of God laying aside his garments of glory and putting on the garments of a slave to rescue us from our sin.

that's what it meant for him. I know we can't take that in. We can only use words and they don't go very far to describe what it must have meant for God, God the Son, God fully in the Son, to actually come to take the form of a servant, as Philippians 2 puts it, clothing himself with humility, with shame, with servitude for God.

[20:36] Isn't that what really is so amazing to the disciples in John 13, if you read through that passage, where he washed the feet of the disciples, where Peter was so dumbfounded as to think that this Lord that he knew was his Lord was to do such a thing.

That's why Peter said, Lord, you'll never wash my feet. It was unbecoming in Peter's view that this Lord, this Lord of glory, this person should come to bend his knee, to go on to his knees in the presence of Peter and begin to wash his feet with a towel round his waist in the fashion of a slave. Lord, you shall never wash my feet. This is not right, he was saying, Lord. Of course, Jesus corrected him. If I don't wash you, Peter, you have no part with me.

In other words, he's saying, if this doesn't happen, Peter, you can't share with me in any of the benefits that come to my people.

If I don't wash you, if you don't accept me as the servant, if you don't accept me for who I am now, if you don't accept my humility, my servitude, my humiliation, if you don't accept me in my sufferings, if you don't accept me in my lowliness, if you don't accept me as one who has left my garments of glory behind, you cannot share with me in that glory afterwards.

[22:01] And of course, Peter then understands and he goes the opposite, not only my hands, but my head and my feet. Do all of it, Lord. Wash me completely. The glory I had with you before the

world was.

That's where he came from. This is what he came into. This servitude, this humiliation, this ignominy, this shame, this suffering, this death, this grave.

That's the Lord of glory. As the Christmas carol puts it in such a wonderful way, who is he in yonder stall at whose feet the shepherds fall?

Tis the king, oh, wondrous story. Tis the Lord, the king of glory. That's who he was.

That's who he continued to be. But look at what he became in order to save us. That's his petition. But then the purpose for it, as the petition really in a sense continues, we come to the purpose.

[23 : 20] Glorify your son so that your son may glorify you. In other words, that's the ultimate concern of Jesus. Not his own glorifying by the father, but that through that the father will be glorified.

Isn't that an amazing thing in itself? Here is the son saying in his present position as he spoke as a servant in this world saying, Lord, here is my father, here is my greatest concern that you be glorified and for you to be glorified and to be glorified to the salvation, through the eternal life given to these people, now glorify your son so that that can be achieved.

Doesn't it tell us something else that we have to always put before us? That we are in this world to glorify God, to put the glorifying of God first just as Jesus put the glorifying of the father as the ultimate end towards which his own glorifying would reach.

And here's another amazing thing, that when Jesus did come into this world as he did, he came to share in what is so wonderfully put in the first catechism, in the shorter catechism.

What is man's chief end? Man's chief end, created man's chief end, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

[24 : 54] And the son of God came to put himself in that position where he had as his chief concern the glorifying of God the father.

He took to himself what created beings, what created for, the glorifying of God. And there's your example too.

what are we here for? One of the big, big questions that has always been asked of human life is why are we here?

What's the purpose of human life? Why do we exist? Why do we exist different to other forms of life around us?

Well, the simple answer to that is this, to glorify God. everything else is packed into that. And as Augustine so famously put it, we have quoted it so often, where he said, Lord, you have made us for yourself and our soul finds no rest till we find our rest in thee.

[26 : 09] We are made for himself. And because we are made for himself, we are here to glorify him, to bestow honor upon him. Is that the ultimate concern in our lives?

Is that the primary concern? Is that what we live for? Is that our understanding of human life and what it's about? That's what Jesus thought of it. That's what you and I must think of it following his example.

But you see, then he moves on. It's glorify your son so that your son may glorify you so that he may give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

We're not going to all the details of that either, but just to notice that his concern here is that the means by which he would glorify the father is the bestowal of eternal life upon all that the father gave to him.

That's taking us back into eternity so that the authority given to the son before the creation is in fact what Jesus is mentioning here.

[27 : 12] All that you gave him and the authority you gave to me to the son through that that I might give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And then he says this is eternal life that they might know you the only through God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. this is eternal life.

Now this is Christ's prayer. This is not just a definition by the gospel writer John. Some people take it that because Jesus is mentioning here himself as Jesus Christ whom you sent.

Some people take it that this couldn't have been spoken by Jesus himself but when John was recording it for us that he just inserted this verse into it in his memory of what Jesus prayed for.

That's why it's put in that way. But there's no reason whatever why Jesus would not mention himself as Jesus the Christ when he's praying to the Father. What he's saying is basically well I am Jesus

the Christ the anointed one and it is through me that eternal life is to be given to all those whom you gave me from all eternity to be their custodian to be their saviour.

[28 : 25] But let's look at this definition. What is eternal life? eternal life is not something which begins in heaven. It's not something which begins once a person's lost left this world and gone to eternity to be with God when they're saved that is.

Eternal life begins in your receiving of it in this world. And what is eternal life? Well Jesus is saying this is eternal life that they might know you the only true God.

Now obviously that's important. We have to have a proper understanding of what eternal life is where it comes from how we get it. And Jesus puts it very simply yet profoundly.

Eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ whom God sent. In other words knowing God the true God and knowing it through Jesus Christ whom this God sent.

God. But what does he mean by knowing you? That they might know you the only true God. Well to know God we've come across this word also in its theological meaning so often but it's so important in this verse as well because to know God is not just to know some information about him.

[29 : 51] Eternal life is not just having accurate information about God and believing that information to be true. knowing God is actually the knowing of a personal relationship and in fact John uses a word here the word know is actually an ongoing tense in the way it's put here in the text of the Bible it's really literally saying this is eternal life to go on knowing you as the only true God.

You have eternal life today in your possession already glory not in its fullness of course because that awaits heaven itself and the glory that awaits God's people glorified in heaven but you have eternal life you possess eternal life when you've come to know God when you've come to walk in friendship with God when you've come into proper living spiritual fellowship with God through having your sin forgiven through having his acceptance of you through having his justified verdict over you that you are now acceptable to him in all of that really it's packed into knowing God because knowing God is walking in friendly fellowship with him walking in a living relationship of friendship with God.

That's eternal life to know you the only true God. Is that where we're at?

Is that our understanding of eternal life? Are we today something short of that? Do we think of eternal life as something else?

Well this is Christ's definition of it and of course you can't get a better definition than that. It's to know. To go on knowing God.

[31 : 52] To be in that living friendship with him. That's eternal life in its possession. And you see he's saying the only true God.

Now it doesn't mean by that that Jesus did not see himself as God. But what he's emphasizing is that this God that he has come to reveal. This God of which he is a person within the Trinity.

This God of which the Father is also the true God. This is the only true God. What does that mean for us? It means for us that serving any other God with a small G instead of a capital G and even if you give it a capital G it doesn't matter.

Serving every other God equals idolatry. And idolatry to the true God is deeply offensive.

Now that's not very politically correct is it? But we're not apologizing for saying it. It's not politically correct to say that worshipping in the worship of Buddha, in the worship of Islam, in the worship of whatever other gods and worship in Hinduism or whatever other form of religion you might find among human beings or even in the non-religion so-called of secularism or humanism where basically people worship humans themselves and their human ideology.

[33 : 27] It's all idolatry. And idolatry is offensive to God. It's dishonoring to Christ. Christ. This is eternal life.

To know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent. There's eternal life in no other and through no other means but by this true God through this Jesus Christ whom you sent as he put it.

Are we offended today by idolatry? Are we offended by alternatives to Christ? Do we find these grievous to our souls?

Are we so used to the idolatry of our day that we fail to see how much it besmirch the name of Christ? How much it brings dishonor upon our Savior?

How much it attacks the exclusiveness of Christ as the only way to God the Father and to eternal life? Let's not let all of the idolatry of the world ooze its way into our souls so that we become so

used to it that we fail to see how deeply offended God is by it.

[34 : 41] He will not share his glory with any other and if you read through the prophecy of Isaiah especially more than any other prophecy I think in the Old Testament Isaiah was given by God insights into the destructiveness and the offensiveness and the foolishness of idolatry and it's especially his concern to show how it is an attack upon the glory of God upon the beauty of God and indeed upon the dignity of man as created in his image this is eternal life and you know the more we actually are convinced of Christ definition the more urgency it will add to our evangelism because not only is evangelism about saving souls about bringing people to know eternal life not that we can do it in our own power but our ministry is to reach out with the gospel so that we hope they will come to know it but it's not just about their salvation it's about the glory of this

God because as long as people live in idolatry they are in fact dishonoring this God and you want people to come to honor this God so you reach out to them with the gospel and you pray and you hope that they will come to know eternal life for this is eternal life to know you and Jesus Christ to know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent he was sent he came he went back to where he came from and he's coming again and all our hopes as Christians are inside the parameters of that mission Christ's coming and Christ's second coming and this is eternal life to know you the only true God and Jesus

Christ whom you sent this is how it's put in one of the famous hymns we can sing these words with a consciousness of what eternal life is if we know God and know Jesus Christ whom he sent oh I am my beloved's and my beloved's mind he brings a personer into his house of wine I stand upon his merit I know no other stand not even where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land I shall sleep sound in Jesus filled with his likeness rise to love and to adore him to see him with these eyes between me and resurrection but paradise doth stand then then for glory dwelling in Emmanuel's land the bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegroom's face

I will not gaze at glory but on my king of grace not at the crown he giveth but on his pierced hand the lamb is all glory in Emmanuel's land let's pray lord we give thanks that all the glory belongs to you and that as your word tells us even in the glory of your people in their final state of glory that the lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land oh lord we give thanks that our glory is subsumed under your own we give thanks for the way in which that gives us confidence knowing that we have not earned it ourselves that we have not created this eternal life for us even though we brought on ourselves the sin and the lostness that we are rescued from we thank you for your grace a grace that looked upon us in our plight not because we deserved it but rather as undeserving you pitied us you sent your son into this world he gave himself for his people lord we thank you that you are coming back that you're coming back as the king as the conqueror as the judge we thank you for all that that means for your people for their vindication for the crowning of their hopes so that you will fulfill your own prayer as we read father i will that they also whom you gave me be with me where i am that they may see my glory which you have given me oh lord may this today be our hearts desire to for jesus sake amen