

Christ's Definition of Eternal Life

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: 18 December 2020

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] verses, Jesus' prayer or petitions for himself. And it's important that we realize that they are very significantly placed before the prayers that he has for the disciples and then for the church as that widens out as he goes through the chapter, the church indeed to the end of time.

And the reason that that is important is that it's significant theologically, because when he goes on to pray for the disciples of the wider church as well, what you'll find is that everything that he speaks of then from verse 6 onwards, we need to realize that that's actually based upon what he's prayed for already regarding himself.

It's what he prays for for himself and what he prays for God the Father to do for him and with him. And that's really the basis of what we find from verse 6 onwards, what's going to happen to his disciples, what's going to happen to the church.

Because everything really at the end of the day that we come to know of as an advantage in the gospel, that actually goes back to Jesus himself as foundational to our salvation.

And so let's just go through these verses just to remind ourselves of the connections between these verses. What you find there at the end of verse 1, he's saying, glorify your son so that the son may glorify you.

[1 : 31] Then we saw how that was connected to verse 2. That is so that what he's saying in verse 2 will actually come to fruition or to pass. Glorify your son that your son may glorify you since you have given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

In other words, for eternal life to be given to those who are going to receive it, that itself, first of all, needs to be preceded by the exaltation of Christ, the glorification of Christ himself.

Everything flows really, as we said, from what happens to Jesus himself. But then you see he takes this verse 3 as a definition of the eternal life that he speaks of there in verse 2, 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. That's this definition of eternal life.

And we're going to look at that in a moment in some detail. And then as you go from there to verse 4, we're back to the basis of that eternal life becoming ours.

[2 : 42] Where he says, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. It's the accomplished, finished work of Jesus, the work of salvation, the work of atonement.

That's the basis on which the application of eternal life comes to us. We come to receive it and benefit from it. And so then moves into verse 5, and now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world was.

So that's really adding to verse 2, glorify your son. He's now defining what that is as well. It's the glory that he had with God the Father before the world was, except now, as we saw last time.

It's going to involve him as the God-man, the mediator of our human nature, as that is, united forevermore to him. So I've said that.

Let's look at, first of all, verse 3, where Jesus defines eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

[3 : 51] In other words, he's saying, this is eternal life. This is what eternal life consists of. It's going, of course, to the principle of the thing. It's going to the kernel of the thing. He's not concerned at this time to go into any details, for example, of what heaven might be like or anything like that.

He's simply saying, this is eternal life. This is its essence. This is really the substance of it. So we can say from that, that as far as Jesus is concerned, and therefore, as far as we are concerned, eternal life is not found outside of this, what he refers to as knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Eternal life does not exist without that wonderful knowledge of God in Christ. Jesus as our savior, our mediator, and the one who brings us to God on the basis of our salvation.

What he's saying here is, this is eternal life, that they will know you. So from that, you say anything else that seeks to pass itself off, however wonderful it may be in human teaching as eternal life or adequate to bring human beings eternal life, life that goes on forever, life that is above the life that we enjoy in this world, that, he says, is not the case.

Everything to do with eternal life and its substance, what it consists of, our coming to know it, coming to enjoy it, coming to possess it, it's all within this knowing of God on our part.

[5 : 24] And Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. And the other angle to that is that wherever you have this knowing of God, we'll see what that consists of in a minute as well, but wherever individuals or an individual knows God and Jesus Christ, wherever that relationship exists, wherever you find that personal relationship, there you already have the possession of eternal life.

You know Jesus tonight as your savior. You relate to him. You have a relationship with him. You speak to him. You pray to him. You worship him as we are tonight.

And in that, you have eternal life. You mustn't think that eternal life begins after our period in this world is over, that eternal life begins the moment we enter heaven.

What Jesus is saying is this is eternal life, that they know you. And the knowledge that we have of God that brings us eternal life is that knowledge that doesn't await our entrance to heaven.

It happens here. It's a knowledge of God. It's a knowledge of Jesus as our savior. We already possess eternal life when you come to know Jesus Christ.

[6 : 39] Of course, that doesn't mean that we have eternal life in its fullness as it will be enjoyed and experienced in heaven itself. Because the eternal life that God gives us in this world is not itself heaven, although it is heavenly in its essence, in its nature.

Heaven is not yet. Heaven is not different, however, in kind from the life, the eternal life, the spiritual life that God has already given you.

What a wonderful truth that is. That the nature of the life that God through Jesus Christ gives us, that we come to have through the knowledge of God, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, knowing him as our savior, the life that is given to us through that and in that relationship is the same in kind as the life that will be experienced in heaven.

Although there, of course, it is, if you like, brought into a new dimension because there is nothing there that interferes with it. There is nothing there of sin, nothing there of bodily confinements, bodily situations in this life.

But it's the same in essence as it is in heaven. And that is surely one of the most wonderful things to realize, one of the most wonderful privilege to come to know, that God has already here in this life given his people through their relationship with Christ and with himself as their God.

[8 : 18] He has given them eternal life, a life that awaits its fullness, its apex, its summit, its perfection in heaven itself.

And that brings you to the knowledge that he speaks of here. This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

In other words, eternal life consists of having a relationship with God, with the Father and the Son. And that personal living relationship is very often in the Bible spoken of as God knowing his people and we his people knowing him.

We find that way back in the Old Testament, for example, Genesis 18, verse 19, God speaks about Abraham and he says, I know him so that he will teach his children or discipline his children after him.

Now, God is not saying there that he actually knows all about Abraham. He does. Of course, that's true. But what God is saying is, I know him in the sense that I have an intimate relationship with him.

[9 : 29] I have that personal relationship with him. And that's the basis of how he actually goes about to teach his children. It's from the fact of my knowing him, of my having entered into relationship with him, of my having a personal relationship with him, that he then sets about teaching his children.

And so it is for all of us who are privileged to have children. It's from the knowledge God has of us. It's from God having entered into this living fatherly relationship with us, whether we are fathers or mothers, even grandparents.

It's from a relationship with God that the enabling comes, by which we are able to teach our families, pass on to them the things that God has given to us.

And it's used again like that in Amos chapter 3, verse 2, where he says to Israel, you only have I known of all the families of the earth. Now think about that for a minute.

You only have I known of all the families of the earth, God is saying to Israel. And that obviously doesn't mean they are the only family that God knows anything about. God knows all the families of the earth perfectly and minutely.

[10:47] What he's saying is you are the only family, you are the only people into which I have entered, with which I have entered this relationship of salvation, of revealing myself to you, of me becoming your God.

You only have I known. I'm the one that you have come to know as your covenant God, and you are the only ones who are my covenant people. Of course, then the next verse says, therefore I will punish.

That's itself another dimension, just to mention it in passing, you can follow it through in your own studies. The basis on which God is saying, therefore I will punish or discipline you, is the fact that they are already as children, children who have gone astray, and therefore God is set upon their recovery, their chastisement, their discipline.

That would not be appropriate, except as they are already as children. You only, I have known of all the families of the earth, therefore. And then when you come to follow that through in the new covenant, as mentioned in Jeremiah chapter 31, and in verse 34, one aspect of that new covenant is the way in which we come to know God, and to know him in a way that surpasses the way his people knew him in the Old Testament.

And then perhaps one of the most wonderful of all is in the prophecy of Hosea. Hosea is so significant in this regard, because it sets out the relationship between God and his people in the marriage of Hosea and his wife.

[12:25] And when God is saying through Hosea to these wayward people that have turned their back on God and gone after other gods, other alternatives, and God is so graphic in the language he uses.

They have just prostituted themselves to these lovers, to these gods. It's important that we retain the language of scripture to get the dynamic and the power of the message it's putting across to us. That is what he's saying there. But God is promising that he will work to bring things around, to bring them back, to woo them. Indeed, it's the word that he uses in one context.

And in chapter 2 of Hosea, verses 18 to 19, he's saying, I will betroth you to myself forever. I will establish you in marriage to myself, in righteousness, in steadfast love.

And then he says, I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. The knowledge, the intimate relationship that is in a human marriage, that intimate bond, that intimate mutual relationship that's shared in the union between a man and wife, is itself actually an example or an illustration of the union between God and his people, the spiritual union in which he regards them as those that he knows, and they regard him as the God they know.

[14:01] And that's really built into what Jesus is saying here in the use of this word know. This is eternal life, that they know you, the only through God.

Tonight you have eternal life through knowing God, through having a personal, intimate, close bond of union and fellowship with God as your God.

It's from that that every blessing comes. It's from that that eternal life itself comes to your possession through that. And he says, therefore, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only through God.

And the only through God is important as well. And it's in the phrase that's used, especially that word true, and also the word only, that they know you, the only through God.

John's gospel, the word through is used a number of times with the same sort of meaning. I am the true vine. My father is the vine dresser.

[15:12] Passage we read in chapter six. Moses did not give you that bread from heaven. My father gives you the true bread from heaven. The manna that came from heaven literally fell physically from heaven.

So in a sense, they were right in saying that. But what Jesus is saying, that wasn't the true manna. That wasn't the manna that had spiritual life attached to it.

That wasn't the relationship the father had with God. When he's saying here, the true God, you might say, I say with reverence, that true means the real thing, the real deal.

If you like, we could maybe say that true here indicates the very DNA of God. Is there such a thing, a spiritual sense, the being of God, the life that is in God himself.

This is what he's saying, that they might know you, that they know you, the only true God, the God who alone is God, the God who is distinct as God.

[16:21] And of course, that's emphasized all the way through the Old Testament repeatedly, especially again, through the prophets who are combating the tendency of Israel, of Judah, of going after the gods of Canaan, the idols of Canaan, the gods that were not gods.

And consistently, and you find it also, of course, in the Psalms. And did you find it in the opening chapters of the Bible, where you find God's creation described in the way it is, the creation of all of nature as it exists, including the sun and the moon and the stars.

And one of the purposes behind that is that in presenting that to God's people through the Old Testament, they were always reminded from that, that the gods, the idols that were worshipped by the pagans, by the nations around them, the sun, the moon, the stars, planets, they were created by God as physical entities, not gods, not worthy of worship.

they might know you, the only true God. But what about Jesus? Where does that leave this Jesus as he's saying this, as he's praying this to God?

This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God. Where does that leave Jesus? Is he outside of being the true God, seeing he's speaking this way?

[17:51] And of course, you know the answer to that. Firstly, you notice he's not saying that they will know you, the only true God, by Jesus Christ whom you sent.

There's nothing, there's nothing heretical in that. It is by Jesus, through Jesus Christ, we have come to have God revealed to us.

That's not the word he's using, he's using and. This is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. And you immediately say, well, if Jesus Christ himself is essential to our having eternal life, if the knowing of God is essential to having eternal life, then Jesus Christ must be God.

It's not just you, the only true God. It is and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. So the God he is praying to, and he himself, are wonderfully bound together in the language used, so that you conclude from that, knowing Jesus is essential to eternal life, as much as knowing the Father.

And Jesus here is speaking, you see, as the mediator, as the God man, the one who has come to bring his people to God, and has brought God to them in his own person.

[19:13] And as he's speaking as the mediator, that doesn't mean he's less than God. He is still God. And as God, it's essential to know him.

And that's why the word and is used. If you read it just through again, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

And it's important to notice, and here's something that's important also always in the Bible, just to know the placement of words is sometimes really hugely important. The word only here is placed very deliberately, and it's translated here just as it is, in the placement of the Greek language in which the New Testament was written.

Jesus did not say, you only are the true God. He is saying, you are the only true God.

What's the difference between you only are the true God, and you are the only true God? Well, the difference is this. The Father is not, the Father is the only true God.

[20:26] The Son is the only true God. The Holy Spirit is the only true God. But it would be wrong to say, it would be a heresy to say, that the Father only is the true God, or that the Son only is the true God, or that the Holy Spirit only is the true God.

Each of them is the only true God. There is no other God, and the God you find in Jesus, the God you find in the Father, the God you find in the Holy Spirit, the one God, and each of the persons is God as much as the other.

That's why he's saying, not you only are the true God, that they might know you only the true God. He's saying that they know you, the only true God.

That means the deity, the divinity, the Godness of Jesus is essential there in our understanding of what he's saying. So he's saying, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.

And that itself makes it clear to us that not only is God the basis of our eternal life, but Jesus himself is at the heart of that as also God himself.

[21 : 56] But then he goes on to speak of his completion of his allotted work. So Christ's definition of eternal life and then Christ's completion of his allotted work.

He goes on to speak, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. We saw the meaning of I glorified you on earth last time. It means to bring praise to, to bring honor to, the work that Jesus did, brought praise and honor to God, the Father.

And he's just reiterating that just now. But then he goes on to speak of the way by which this was done, having accomplished or finished the work that you gave me to do.

Now remember, Jesus is here speaking before the cross had taken place. Before he went out to face his trial, the Gethsemane, agony, and then on to the cross itself, followed by the burial of his body, the resurrection, and then his exaltation to glory, and his being seated then at God's right. All of that is in the future, actually, as far as this time is concerned when he's speaking these words. So why is he actually saying, I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do?

[23 : 16] Well, it means more than the work that he had done up to that point. Because it all ties together in one wonderful, whole, complete work. And when Jesus is asking God the Father to glorify him, and to glorify him with the glory he had with him before the world was, that necessarily takes account and takes into account the finished work of Jesus.

You can't imagine him saying, Father, glorify me now with your own self, but I haven't quite finished the work yet. Because the finished work is the basis from which his exaltation proceeds.

It's the fact that his finished work, the cross, and then followed by the resurrection, the fact that that is finished, it's complete. That's what leads to his exaltation, as Philippians 2 reminds us.

Now, so he's speaking from the perspective of verse 5. Glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world was. And what Jesus is doing is in his mind saying, this is what is being presented by me to you, Father.

I'm basing this on the fact that the work is finished, though actually it's not at that point. But theologically and spiritually, it all hangs together, it all goes together, it all fits together.

[24 : 44] And therefore, he can say, I finished the work, I glorified you on earth, I accomplished the work, having accomplished the work you gave me to do.

And on the basis of that, he asks for what he comes to in verse 5, and now, Father, glorify me. So you see the wonderful progression from verse 1 right through there to verse 5, including this definition of eternal life, and including this request that Christ be exalted, be glorified, because he glorified and has finished the work that was given him to do.

What can we make, then, of this practically just a conclusion? Well, what we've seen so far, you could say, actually underpins Christian assurance, the assurance of your salvation, the assurance in regard to what your salvation consists of, and the certainty of it, certainly from God's point of view.

Because what you see there, all the way through from verse 1, is that salvation is set infallibly in God, and in God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, though that's not mentioned as the Father and Son here particularly, it is impossible that that salvation of all that the Father has given him, as he puts it there in verse 2, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him, it is impossible that that should not be the outcome of everything else he's saying and requesting for himself.

Because the glorifying in the Father's presence with the glory he had before the world was cannot but be successful as the basis on which eternal life is given to all that the Father has given him.

[26 : 40] Every single individual and the whole unit of people that were given to God by God the Father to the Son before the world even existed.

That's what the Bible refers to as our election in Christ. But all that is in that, all that is within that, every individual within that, the whole company of God saved people together as given to Christ. He speaks of that further on in the chapter as well as he does indeed of things that were done by him but weren't quite actualized at that time.

So he's saying verse 12, while I was with them I kept them in your name which you have given me. In other words, he's anticipating that having gone back to glory he can look back and say well this is what I did this is what I accomplished it's finished it's complete but the work of a redemption

between the Father and the Son the authority that has been given to the Son the glorifying of the Son as our mediator the commitment of the Father as well as the Son to our redemption the perfection of these relationships all of that guarantees absolutely that all who put their trust in him will be in heaven and all who know him as their God as their Father as their Savior will indeed be in heaven it's infallibly in the hands of God and in the hands of God it means that it's between the Father and the Son authority has been given to him to give this eternal life that authority proceeds on the basis that he has finished the work that he's accomplished it and now that he's glorified with the Father things proceed on from there where is your redemption firmly based is it in your own ability to think is it in your own prayer life is it in the quality of your faith well it's not thankfully or mine it's all in this it's God himself our infallible faithful God providing us with the basis for our assurance of salvation well as salvation itself the second thing is that not only does this underpin [29 : 32] Christian assurance and with this I'm finished it also moves Christian evangelism that moves Christian evangelism why is that because we as we'll see in the further parts of the chapter we are the agents of God through which everything in verses 2 to 3 operates on earth see he's saying here Christ has given authority is given authority to give eternal life to all whom you have given them but he's made his people agents of presenting the gospel to the world around them that's why he's going to speak as he is and pray as he is for them later on for their protection for their sanctification it's enough for us just now to know that as God's agents we seek to present the truth of Christ and the need of sinners to them in the gospel and because the salvation of God's people is infallibly guaranteed we can be sure that however it seems to us through

God's people as the gospel is made known all of God's people will be taken into the kingdom not a wonderful assurance for you as you witness to Christ you're not asking or wondering or posing the question well I wonder if all of these people that God has actually chosen in Christ will be saved it's not for you and to me to know who they are or to be able to distinguish them in the street or wherever it is you are or whoever you're talking to but you can go out with the gospel and then you witness for Christ and say it is my privilege to witness for Christ and I am guaranteed that every single person that's within the giving of the father to the son will come to him and will come to him even through such poor means and such poor instruments and agents as you and I came across this quotation from W.C.

Burns William Chalmers Burns he was in the mid 1800s he went to China he was from Tilsay he church ministered same time as Chalmers and spent some time in Dundee at one time when McChain was in the Holy Land through William Chalmers Burns a revival broke out in Dundee of which McChain from the Holy Land was delighted in any case he ended up going to China and spending the rest of his life in mission work there in China and he was burdened for souls he was burdened for the lost and in one of his statements this is what he said it is a fearful sin to be going through the world with a light kindled by the Holy Spirit to guide sinners to Christ and yet carry this as a dark lantern that cannot benefit anyone read that again because it's very challenging it is a fearful sin to be going through the world with a light kindled by the Holy Spirit to guide sinners to Christ and yet carry this as a dark lantern that cannot benefit anyone in other words it was appealing and as the words are now appealing to us let your light shine for men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven we pray that God will bless these thoughts on his word to us he the one