

WHAT IS ETERNAL LIFE?

JOHN 17:1-4 • TV077B

A television broadcast sermon delivered

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24TH, 1982

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Transcribed, edited and published

JULY 13TH, 2017

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John 17:1-4

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

I want you to turn in your Bible today for the message to the book of **John chapter 17**. I’m going to read the first three verses of **John 17** and speak to you on the subject: **“THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE.”**

I think if you’ll listen to this message carefully and you will follow in your Bible while I read the Scriptures, it may be that the Spirit of God will give you some understanding, some light, on this subject: **“THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE.”**

In **John 17:1** our Lord lifted His eyes to heaven and said; *“Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee. As thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He should*

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give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him. And this is eternal life that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Now, we couldn't find a better source to study on the subject, “**Eternal Life**” than the Lord Himself. And we couldn't find a better text anywhere in the Bible than the one in which our Lord said: “*This is eternal life,*” and then defines it.

He prays to the Father and He says; “*Thou hast given me power over all flesh that I should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given me, and this is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”

Now most people, when they hear the term “*eternal life,*” suppose that we mean heaven or life after death. But, it does mean that; it means a whole lot more. When the average person hears you talking about “*eternal life,*” he's thinking about something that occurs in the future, something that takes place after death, something we have in heaven.

Well, it does mean that but it means a whole lot more than that. Now listen to me; eternal life that our Lord is talking about here begins, it commences, in the believer right here on the earth. It's not a future experience only. It begins in a believer as soon as he is born again; that's right, as soon as we are born again we have eternal life.

Now listen to the Scriptures, **John 5:24**: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you: He that heareth my Word and believeth on Him that sent me hath eternal life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed; **has already passed,** from death to life.*”

Now listen to the Scriptures, **John 5:24**: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you: He that heareth my Word and believeth on Him that sent me hath eternal life and shall not come into condemnation but is passed; (**has already passed**), from death to life.*”

He has eternal life. “*He that heareth my Word and believeth on Him that sent me hath eternal life.*” He's already passed from death unto life.

And John wrote in **1 John 3:14**: “*We know that we have passed from death unto life.*” In other words, the believer, the born again believer, the man who knows God, already has eternal life. He has the same spiritual life right now that he'll have in heaven.

He has the same spiritual life right now in Christ that he'll enjoy throughout eternity for he's already a child of God. He's already born of God. He already has a divine nature. He already has divine life and he already has spiritual life.

So, that's the first thing that we need to understand about eternal life. It's not some future experience only; it's a present possession. “*He that heareth my Word and believeth on Him that sent me, (right now) has eternal life.*”

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And that same spiritual life that the believer has right this minute in Christ is the life he's going to have throughout eternity. In other words, I'm saying that death does not bring us eternal life; Christ does.

Death does not transport us into a new life; Christ transports us into a new life. We are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, out of the kingdom and power of darkness. Death doesn't bring us eternal life; Christ does.

Well what does death do preacher? Well, it rids us of those things of the flesh which hinder our spiritual life and you have plenty of those things and I do too. There are things that drag us down, that hinder us.

Paul called it "*a body of sin*" that we carry about, "*a body of death*," and someday we are going to lay it aside, some day we are going to put it aside. Death is going to rid us of those things that hinder our spiritual life from being fully expressed in all of its beauty and all of its glory.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13:9**: "*Now we know in part.*" We know God, we know Christ, and we know His will of redemption. We know His way of saving sinners.

We know how He can be just and justify the ungodly. "*The Son of God hath come and given us an understanding that we might know the true God.*" We know, but we know in part. We only know partly.

"But when that which is perfect is come, we shall know as we have been known." And that's what death does you see. I know now. I have spiritual life now. I have eternal life now. I have the life of God now. But I know now in part.

But when death rids me of my limited, mental capacity and my limited ability to love, my limited ability to understand, when death rids me of this human flesh, then I'm going to know as I have been known.

He says, "*Now we see through a glass darkly*," but we do see. If we didn't have spiritual life we couldn't see. "*We see, we see through a glass dimly*," but we do see. We see the glory of the Lord but someday we will see Him face to face.

I couldn't stand that sight right now and you couldn't either, not in the flesh. But one of these days, "*when that which is perfect is come*," then we shall see perfectly. And faith will give way to reality and hope will give way to possession.

So, the eternal life that we are talking about here is a present possession; it's something that the believer possesses right now. "*He that heareth my Word and believeth on Him that sent Me already has eternal life.*"

Now this is the third thing I want you to see. This is why our Lord came into the world. He came into the world; the grand design of His perfect obedient life, the grand design of His

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sacrificial death, the grand design of His resurrection and His intercession is to give eternal life to all believers. That's why He came, to give eternal life.

He said **in John 10:10**, *"I am come that they might have life and they might have it more abundantly."* That's why He came. Paul said, *"Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. I am come that they might have life."*

And then **1 John 5:11** says: *"This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life. God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

You see, death does not bring us eternal life; Christ does. This life is Christ. That's why He came into the world. *"He came into this world that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly."*

He had an obligation to discharge in reference to God's law. He had an obligation to discharge in regards to God's justice and righteousness that we might live. And He fulfilled all those requirements and He gave us eternal life.

It is in the power of Christ to give eternal life. Look at that verse again, **John 17**; He said: *"Thou hast given Him power over all flesh."* It is in the power of Christ to give eternal life. God has given Him that power by His obedience, He honored the law and He has power, He has power to deliver.

By His death He has satisfied justice and therefore, He has power to justify. By His resurrection He conquered death; therefore, He has the power to raise us. He has the authority you see. And by His intercession He has the power to take me into the presence of God.

He could not do any of these things for me if He had not come. *"I am come that they might have life."* And because He came and because He fulfilled all that He came to do, He has been given that power. *"God has delivered all things into the hands of His Son."*

And because of His obedience He has the power to give me righteousness. He has the power by His sacrifice to give me cleansing. He has power by His visit in the tomb and His resurrection to raise me. He said, *"Because I live you shall live."*

And because He is that great High Priest; He has the power to take me into the very presence of God and to seat me on God's right hand with Him in glory.

All right; eternal life's not only in the power of Christ but in the person of Christ. *"Thou hast given Him power (authority) over all flesh, that He should give eternal life."*

It's by our union with Christ that we have life. I have no life in myself. I have natural life and I have mental life but I have no spiritual life in myself; it's in Christ. *"And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

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“In Adam I died. In Christ I’m made alive.” He restored my soul.

He told this to Martha in **John 11:23-26**; *“Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”*

Paul in **Colossians Chapter 3:4** says; *“When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye appear with Him in glory.”* When some people talk about eternal life they talk as if it was something out yonder somewhere that’s going to occur apart from the person of Christ.

But Christ is life. *“He that hath the Son hath life.”* He that hath the Son of God hath resurrection. He that hath the Son of God hath eternal existence. All of it is in Christ. And it’s because of our union with Christ that we have this life, eternal life, spiritual life, and divine life. Call it what you will but it’s in Christ.

I read an article one time that said something like this: *“There’s mineral life in the rocks and the ground. You have mineral rights on your property.”* Well, there’s mineral life.

And then there’s vegetable life; the things that grow have life. Without life a thing wouldn’t grow. Corn wouldn’t grow without life. Your apple tree has life in it. If it’s not dead it has life. So there’s vegetable life.

And then there’s animal life. Your dogs and cats have life, animal life. And then there’s mental or natural life. And mental life or natural life is high above animal life as animal is above vegetable life. You’ve got mineral life and animal life. You’ve got vegetable life and you have mental life.

And then there’s spiritual life or eternal life. And this spiritual life is as high above natural, mental life, as mental life is high above animal life. And this spiritual life is Christ; it’s of God; we are born of God.

“Now that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” I was born by my mother and father and they gave me fleshly life, mental life, and natural life. I’m a living person. But when I was born of God I received the life of God.

Do you see that? It’s **John chapter 3**. That’s what being born again is. It’s not just a profession of religion. It’s not just a denominational party spirit; it’s to be born of God, born from above.

In **John 1:12-13**; *“To as many as received Him to them gave he the right to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His name which were born, not of blood, (that is, not a fleshly inheritance, not of human parents), and not of the will of the flesh.”*

It’s not something man wills to do. It’s not of the will of man. It’s not something we can do for someone else. *“We are born of God, we are born of God.”* Do you understand what I’m saying?

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There is a mineral life in the rocks and the coal and these other things. There's a vegetable life in the things that we eat. And there's an animal life in our pets. And there is a natural life in men and women, natural life. *"We are born of the flesh and that which is born of the flesh is flesh."*

But there's a spiritual life and that spiritual life is as high above that mental life as that mental life is above that animal life. And that animal life came from another animal and they breed after their kind.

Horses have horses and sheep have sheep and goats have goats and cows have cows. And dogs have dogs. And men and women have boys and girls. God gives life, spiritual life and that's eternal life. That's what it is and it's in Christ.

For this is the charge that Christ brought against those Pharisees; He said in **John 5:40**: *"You will not come to me that you might have life."* Life is not in the church. Eternal life is not in the church. The church can't give life.

Eternal life's not in a doctrine. Our Lord said; *"You search the scriptures. In them you think you have life. But they are they which testify of me and you will not come to me that you might have life."* Life is not in the Scriptures; it's in Christ. It's in a living, vital, union, with a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is not in the ceremony. You can't eat the Lord's Table, bread and wine, and get life. You can't eat the wafer and the wine at the Sacrament or Communion or whatever you want to call it. But you can't get life from these things.

Life is not in the Sacraments. It's not in the Communions; it's in what it represents, the person of Christ. He said; *"This is my body which is broken for you. This is my blood which is shed for you. You eat my flesh and drink my blood and you have life. If you don't eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you."*

You have natural life and you have mental life but you don't have spiritual life unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God, just like the Israelites in the wilderness ate the manna but that manna just refreshed their natural lives and they died. *"But he that eateth this bread liveth forever; he that drinketh this blood liveth forever."*

Come to Christ that you might have life. He said to the Jews, *"You will not come to me that you might have life."* *"He that believeth on the Son of God hath life. He that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

Now go back to our text. He said; *"Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He might give eternal life."* Christ has the power to give life. Christ says that life is in the person of Christ.

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And then it's the promise of Christ. He's promised eternal life. It's a promise. He says: "*Thou hast given Him authority or power to give eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him.*"

Our Lord has a people. If you'll read **John 17** after this program goes off the air, you'll find six times our Lord uses this phrase: "*To as many as thou hast given Him.*" It's six times in this priestly prayer in **John 17** He talks about His sheep, "*those whom the Father hath given Him.*"

And then in **John 10:24**, some people came to Him. Turn there in **John 10:23 and 24**, and they said, "*How long do you make us to doubt? If you be the Christ just tell us plainly, tell us in words we can understand.*"

And He said: "*I told you but you believe not. You believe not because you're not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*"

You see, this eternal life is the life of Christ, it's an abiding life, it's a continuous life, it's an unchangeable life, and it's a life that will never end. That's why it's called "*eternal life.*"

It's as eternal as the God whose life it is. It's as eternal as the power of Christ whose life it is. It's as eternal as the promise of Christ whose promise it is. That's right, eternal life. And Paul says in **Philippians 1:6**: "*He that hath begun a good work in you shall finish it (perfect it, shall perform it), in the day of Jesus Christ.*"

Now my friend; this thing of salvation, I'm telling you, according to this Book, eternal life is a whole lot more than walking down a church aisle and giving a preacher your hand and saying you believe some doctrine.

This thing of eternal life is a whole lot more than reading the Bible and saying, "Well, I believe a few mental facts here or I give mental agreement to a few facts here and turn over a new leaf and start living right and attend church on Sunday."

This thing of salvation is more than that. Christ said, "*Thou hast given me authority, over all flesh that I should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given me.*"

Now, in **verse 3**; this is interesting. Our Lord points out some evidences of that life. Now you stay with me for a few moments. Our Lord points out some marks of eternal life because I know some of you are asking now, "Well, do I have eternal life? Am I a recipient of eternal life? I'm a religious person. I go to church. I believe what that preacher is saying. I believe the Bible. Do I have eternal life?"

All right, listen to Christ; it is in the power of Christ to give it because He fulfilled every requirement. It's in the person of Christ. It's not an experience, it's a person. It's not a profession, it's a person. Don't forget that.

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We live because of Him and our union with Him. *“He’s the vine and we’re the branches”* and a branch severed from that vine has no life. The life’s in the vine and the branch partakes of nourishment and life because of its union with the vine. Do you see that?

Christ said, *“I’m the vine and you’re the branches.”* So, I partake of nourishment and life, spiritual life, because of my union with Christ, not because of who I am or what I’ve done, but because of who He is. He’s the head and I’m the body. We are members of that body in particular.

All right, now Christ said, *“And this is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”* This is life eternal.

Now my friend, if you’ll notice that the great evidence of eternal life given by our Lord is not outward conduct but inward knowledge. Now stay with me! Our Lord said, *“This is eternal life that they might know God, the living God, (the only true and living God) and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”*

It is true, no question about it, that if a man has eternal life his past is changed. That’s right; his sins are blotted out, he’s forgiven: *“Though your sins be as scarlet; I’ll make them white as snow. Though they be red like crimson; they shall be as wool.”* It is true there is no condemnation in Christ. The past is taken away; it’s changed.

If a man has eternal life his presence is changed, that’s right, it’s changed. *“He’s a new creature in Christ;”* that’s true, no question about that. He walks in light, not in darkness. *“If we walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth.”*

He walks in love, not in hate. He walks in God’s glory, not in selfishness. He loves the people of God. He loves the Word of God. He loves the God of the Bible. He loves Christ.

I’ve heard people say, “Well preacher, you know, since I’ve been converted I’ve gone back to some of the old places and to some of the old crowd but they’re not the same.” Yes they are the same too, yes they are the same. You are the one that’s changed; they are the same, but you have changed.

If a man’s in Christ, if he has eternal life, his past is changed, his presence is changed, and his future is changed. That’s right; he is a new man and he belongs to a new family. He’s a citizen of a heavenly kingdom and he’ll be satisfied when he awakes with Christ’s likeness.

That’s true; now don’t you misunderstand it. If a man has eternal life *“he’s a new creature,”* filled with the Spirit of God. He loves God and he walks in integrity and righteousness and holiness. He’s not perfect but he wants to be.

But the evidences of eternal life given here is not the outward conduct or action but the inward knowledge. He said, *“This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God.”* Now, what does He mean by that? The real evidence of eternal life is to know God.

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Now my friend; Enoch did not just walk down a moral road; he walked with God. He knew God and he fellowshiped with God. Do you see that? He didn't just walk according to a set of rules of righteousness; the Scripture says: "*He walked with God.*" He knew God.

And then Abraham; Abraham didn't just believe in God, believe that there was a God, he believed God. And he was called "*the friend of God.*" And God spoke to him face to face. He knew God.

He didn't just know about God, some truths about God; "*the devil believes God and trembles.*" He knew God. He was the friend of God.

Take Job; Job was not only an upright man but Job trusted God. He knew God. This is what he said, "*Though He slay me I trust him, I trust him.*" He trusted God. That's what it is to know God.

And then David did not only just serve God and write beautiful songs of praise to God but David was knit to the heart of God. The Scripture says: "*He was a man after God's own heart.*"

And then Paul was not only a preacher, he was not only a writer, he was not only a missionary, he was not only an honest man, but he knew the living God. He said, "*I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. I know whom I have believed.*"

Now a lot of people quote that verse this way: "I know in whom I have believed." That's not what it says. Paul says: "*I know whom I have believed.*" He didn't say, "I know what I believe," though he did. He didn't just say, "I know when I believed, although he did but he said, "*I know whom I have believed.*"

And then listen to John; he said, "*We know that the Son of God hath come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we're in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. And this is the true God and this is eternal life.*" This is what it is to know God.

It's not just a path of righteousness; it's walking with God down the path of righteousness. It's not just a belief in doctrine; it's a belief in the Christ of doctrine. It's not just a belief in the Bible; it's to believe in and to know the God who wrote the Bible and believe the Bible because it is God's Word.

"*We know Him and He's given us an understanding.*" We have an understanding of Old Testament prophecies, how that they reveal Christ, Old Testament types, how they prefigure Christ, Old Testament promises that are filled with Christ. We have an understanding of God's righteousness in Christ.

"*This is life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent!*"