

† The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

Celebrating Christmas – Celebrating Eternal Life

John 17:3

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

A couple of nights ago, my family and I were able to attend a Christmas program at one of the local churches in the area. The evening was centered around the choir and orchestra performing songs that spoke of the birth, life and even the meaning of His death and resurrection. The emphasis was evangelistic, that is they want to speak of and proclaim the gospel, the good news as to why Jesus came in the first place. For all this I was grateful and in this regard enjoyable. But at the end the Pastor stood up and walked the gathering through the gospel once more and there was a question that he asked that was simple and yet profound. It is a question that I had heard before but it just struck me differently. The Spirit of God truly caused my heart to “think” about this question because it is a question that can easily be brushed off without much consideration; but I promise you, if you would allow this question to sink into your soul; to examine your own heart in light of such a question; to let the Spirit of God speak to you and reveal to you where you are in light of such a question; you will be both challenged and, I pray encouraged. Do you want to know the question?

At a time when some many might ask the question, “What does Christmas mean to you?” – this pastor asked the question, “What does Jesus mean to you?” Think about that carefully, “What does Jesus mean to you?” [pause]. It does not matter if you come here this morning uncertain about who Jesus is; uncertain about what it means to know Jesus as Lord and Savior – or if you are here as one who has walked with Jesus for many years, the question is just as important and just as valid to consider – “What does Jesus mean to you?” Do you realize that how you are able to honestly answer that question determines the kind of relationship you have with the living God and it determines whether you can have the expectation of spending eternity in either in the blessed presence of your Creator God or in the horrific horrors of hell. What does Jesus mean to you?

To help us consider a biblical answer to that question, I would have you look with me at John 17:3. This verse will serve as the anchor to our consideration this morning of this question, “What does Jesus mean to you?” Let us read it, ***“This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”***

This verse is a definition of sort – it is a definition of eternal life. I don’t know what comes to your mind when you hear the two words “eternal life”, but I imagine that one of the first things that most might think about is “living forever.” Is this eternal life; to live forever? For others, the words “eternal life” might bring to mind visions of heaven and yet other might consider salvation; being saved from one’s sins so as not to be punished in hell but to be granted the privilege and joy of dwelling with God. Is this eternal life?

Certainly some of these ideas are contained in the concept of eternal life; but just what is eternal life? Is it only these things? Is there more to it? Of course I am going to say there is more because if I don’t this will be my shortest message ever – but I do honestly believe that there is so much more to be considered and understood when we contemplate eternal life. And

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as we celebrate in just a couple of days the One who brought us eternal life by His birth, life, death and resurrection, it is my prayer that you will be all the more informed and motivated to praise our great God who has granted eternal life to all who would believe on His Son Jesus Christ. In our text of just about 20 words is one of the most compelling definitions of eternal life. And if I could summarize the verse, I would say to you that **eternal life is an intimate, intensely personal relationship**. This is our thesis then, this is our point of consideration this morning; this is what helps us answer the question of what does Jesus mean to me? **Eternal life is an intimate, intensely personal relationship**.

In our text Jesus says, **“This is eternal life”** – this is what defines eternal life; this is what eternal life is all about; this is the essence of eternal life – **“that they (those who hear the words of Christ and believe in God’s provision of Christ) may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”**

Do you see the essence of what is eternal life? Jesus mentions nothing of longevity or even of heaven. Rather, eternal life is equated with persons – in this case eternal life equals knowing, having an intensely personal, intimate relationship with God the Father and God the Son. It is a knowledge; and continuous, constantly increasing knowledge of these two persons; first of the **“only true God”** and second of **“Jesus Christ whom [God]”** has sent. This is an amazing statement, that eternal life is measured or qualified by one’s knowledge of God. Before we consider what this knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ consists of, let me zero in on this word **“know”**. The word for **“know”** in Greek here is very precise, it means “to come to know, or recognize, or understand completely.” I know some things about my car, but I am not intimate with my car. If something goes wrong inside, I call upon my father-in-law who has known cars intimately, inside and out. This is what it means to know. It carries the idea of being resolved and sure about something or someone. And bound up then in this concept of knowing is the idea of intimacy; to know God as Jesus indicates here is to have a relationship between the person knowing (the believer) and the person known (in this case God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. Do you see this as backwards from the way we generally consider things? We know that God know us intimately; that God knows the number of hairs on our heads, He knows our words before they are on our tongues; He knows our every sin as well as our every joys. But here, eternal life is defined not in terms of God knowing us but of us knowing God intimately. In the most simple of terms, it means that an introduction has been made between two people, and they have come to know each other in a way that was not possible before they met. Beloved, eternal life is the miracle of a sinful person, once alienated, once hostile, once at enmity, once never really caring or considering God or knowing Him in any real, personal or daily way, now being granted the privilege and desire to know Him in an intensely personal way.

So, what is eternal life? Eternal life is knowing God intimately. But what does this mean? Notice that Jesus gives some specific truths here defining God as **“the only true God.”** The word for “only” means “alone or solitary.” This indicates that there is no other, and gives us the idea of a uniqueness. In John 3:16 Jesus is called God’s “only begotten Son” – that is His unique, wholly distinct and different Son. For the angles are sometimes called the “sons of God” and believers are referred to as the “sons of God.” But Jesus is the unique Son of God. This word “only” describes then an exclusive position. Just consider the way this word is used with reference to God.

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In Romans 16:27 we learn that God “only” is wise; in 1 Timothy 6:16 we see that it is God who “alone [or only] possess immortality.” And in Revelation 15:4, we read about the Lord God Almighty of whom it is said, “You alone (or only) are holy.” Each of these describes an attribute of God that He alone possesses, to the exclusion of all others. We are to have this knowledge of Him, to know God by His attributes. This is eternal life – to know that God alone is the source of all wisdom, holiness, immortality power, forgiveness, beauty, goodness, truth, healing, and the list could go on and on. Eternal life is having an increasing knowledge of God in His uniqueness.

In addition to “only” Jesus uses the word “true.” This word means real, authentic, or genuine, and gives the idea of being distinct from all others. When you put the two words together, we see a picture of God as being the only, solitary, genuine, and real God that exists, to the exclusion of all others. In all of creation there exists no other God than the God who has revealed Himself in the pages of Holy Scripture. He alone by nature and existence is God. All others are false.

This is how God was to be known in the Old Testament as well, for consider what He spoke through Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 43:10,

“You are My witnesses,” declares the Lord, “And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me.”

There are many more I could give you, but I think we all get the point. God alone is God; there is no other God besides Him. He alone exists as God in all creation.

Eternal life is knowing God in this way...as the only God. But there is one more relationship Jesus mentions and what we discern from this brings us back to the question, “What does Jesus mean to you?” We will need to walk through this rather quickly, but consider that Jesus also says here that eternal life is knowing ***“Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*** Why does Jesus say this? Because the only way a person can come to know God as we have just described it to know God by and through Jesus. This is what Jesus said in John 14:6, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father (comes to know the Father) but through Me.”***

Eternal life is knowing Jesus. So then, eternal life is not a thing, but a person. If you want to experience the quality of life that fits you for heaven, that enables you to live for God; that causes the guilt of sin to be removed as you realize the forgiveness of God in the work of Jesus on the cross; then you must know Jesus. But just what are we to know about Jesus? It would seem that Jesus is assuming that what is to be known about Him has already been understood? Is this correct? Yes, and using the Gospel of John as our resource, let me walk you through this. I cannot be as exhaustive as I would like but let’s begin back in John 1:1 and see what is communicated, what it is we are to know about Jesus.

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

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Jesus is the Word –

By saying Jesus is the Word, we are to understand that in Jesus is all meaning, all wisdom, He is the sum of all perfection. To know Jesus, is to know that all the fullness of the deity, all the perfections of God are found in Jesus. (Colossians 2:9)

Jesus is God –

While some have sought to diminish Jesus, we are told clearly that Jesus is God and always has been God and that He has existed “with” or face to face with God. Please note this, that Jesus, as God, existed “face to face” with God, in perfect fellowship with God.

John 1:4

4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

Jesus is life –

It is not that Jesus possesses life as though life is something distinct from Him that He has picked up. Rather, Jesus is life, He is the essence of life. In September of 1995, I was licensed by the church to be a pastor. I had not always been a pastor, I was not born a pastor and I am certainly not the essence of what it means to be a pastor. Such a role or function exists apart from me, outside of me. And the same is true of life. I am not life – I have life; it has been granted me. But if you want to really know what life is; what life is all about, what life was designed for, then you must come to Jesus who is life. Jesus said in John 10:10, ***“I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.”*** And Jesus, who is “the life” according to John 14:6, gives life to those who believe, who come to know Him as Lord and Savior.

Jesus is light –

Jesus is light, that is illumination or truth; He is holiness of being. If a person wants to know truth; to have his heart illumined, that is opened up to understand God; and to be right or holy before God, He must come to Jesus.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word became flesh –

Consider that God poured Himself in flesh; God became man. For there to be a meaningful and eternal relationship between God and man, let's make it more personal – for there to be a meaningful relationship between God and you, God had to become a man. God poured Himself into the likeness of sinful flesh. God had to invade this world of darkness in order to reveal the light of who He is and who we are. Beloved, I believe that one of the things this teaches us is that man, flesh, to be able to live, to possess eternal life, needs God to be poured into it. We need God in our lives; we need Jesus in us by way of His Spirit.

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Jesus is grace –

God in the flesh could have come to punish, as we know He one day will, but in this first coming, which we celebrate in this season, Jesus came not in wrath, but in grace; not to judge or condemn but to be a ransom and save from condemnation.

Jesus is truth –

as we have already noted, Jesus is truth, not that He has learned it; not that truth exists outside of Jesus, but to know the truth is to know Jesus; to know what is important to Him; to know His love, His compassion, His life.

And now consider what Jesus said in John 17:3 again, **“This is eternal life, that they may know...Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”** What does Jesus mean to you? It is not a frivolous question? And what would Jesus would have us know about Him? Without progressing any further in the gospel of John, we can already see what is to be known about Jesus, what intimate truths reveal to us that we possess Jesus Christ and have eternal life.

- Eternal life is knowing Jesus as the Word – that He is the perfection of God’s wisdom; the full source of meaning and purpose, that He is more of just an add on, another source for you to draw on as you apply your own wisdom and meaning to life.
- Eternal life is knowing that Jesus is God, your Creator, your Supreme Being, the one to whom you owe your very existence. To see Jesus as life means to see everything else done outside of Jesus, apart from the directives of Jesus as really living in death?
- Eternal life is knowing Jesus as the light – the one who reveals the meaning of life; the truth of God; as the only way to God.
- Eternal life is knowing Jesus as full of grace – recognizing that Jesus owes us nothing, and that while all we deserved from Jesus is condemnation and death, He has lovingly, willingly and compassionately come to save us from our condition of sin, of eternal separation from God.

What does Jesus mean to you? Does He mean your only hope and source of life – not just some future life; for let me add that eternal life is not most prominently about living forever, but is more about a quality of life; a condition of life that for everyone who believes and obeys the Son has as a current possession. Look with me at John 5:24 which says,

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Do you see that those who hear, who are currently and continually hearing (and by implication heeding) the words of Jesus, and are currently and continually believing God, that He has sent Jesus to save us from our sins and fit us for heaven, that such ones as these currently, presently have “eternal life.” Beloved, eternal life is now. Eternal life is Jesus living in you by the indwelling of His Spirit. Eternal life is having Him who is the Word, who is God, who is life, light,

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grace and truth living in you. As Galatians 2:20, says, **“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live (for I have no life in myself) but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself up for me.”**

Beloved, this is why God sent Jesus Christ, to be your life; because before Christ is in you, you are dead, spiritually dead and destined for eternity apart from God; but God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). What does Jesus means to you? I hope He means eternal life, a quality of life that understands and experiences the reality of Christ in you, the hope of glory. I hope He means to you life – a way of life – seeing that living for Him and by Him is so much more exciting, so much more abundant than living for or by anything else. For this is eternal life; to know the only true God; a gracious and compassionate God who desires all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth; that truth being a knowledge of Jesus Christ as life, as meaning, as your pursuit and desire. That is why God sent Jesus, so that just as Jesus dwelt face to face in glory with the Father, that now we to can fellowship with the Father and look forward to the day when we will be face to face with Him.

Soli Deo Gloria

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