

Eternal Life

John 17:2,3

And this is eternal life... Jesus offered these tantalizing words in His garden prayer. Clearly, at this point, it is a teaching prayer. Public prayers are often sermons that are spoken with our eyes closed - intended to move the congregation more than to converse with God. Here, Jesus has spoken to the Father and asked of the Father but now, He speaks of what the Father has given Him (the authority to give eternal life) and then explains the character of eternal life. Let's begin with the assumption that we need an explanation.

The concept of eternal life goes back to the garden. Strangely, the tree of life enters the story as a negative to be avoided rather than as the focal point of the garden experience. Adam and Eve were free to eat from any tree in the garden except for one, which was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The warning was that "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." It is only after the event that we find out about another tree that was in the garden called the tree of life. Once Adam and Eve had sinned, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was essential that they be kept from eating of the tree of life. In their state of sinful rebellion, living forever would have been tragedy upon travesty. So, they were expelled from the garden and "He placed cherubim at the east of the garden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."

This was not an arbitrary punitive act, or a harsh judgment made by an angry God. Instead it showed that eternal life has to do with both quality and quantity of life. And quality of life is immediately defined as right relationship with God. Without right relationship with God (which is quality of life) then eternal life (the forever quantity of life) would be something evil rather than that which is good. Outside of right relationship with God, we are destructive of our own life and that of others. To think of such destructiveness and misery enduring forever is surely a nightmare to any reasonable mind.

Take the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery in John 8. There is no dispute about her guilt. It is also clear that she was used by the religious opponents of Jesus to put Him in a spot where they thought that they could trap Him. This was by no means a normal sort of event. Jesus reacted with dignity and what is for us still a bit of a mystery, writing on the ground (what? we do not know) He looked up and said, "Let him who is without sin throw the first stone." One at a time they melted away until it was just Jesus with the woman (the watchers were still there) and Jesus said to the woman, "Has no one condemned you?" She answered, "No one, Lord" And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." The word "condemn" was used in the sense of sentencing her to die for what she had done. It was as if Jesus said to her, I am not going to impose upon you the death you deserve. Here, instead is life, but, don't take your sin with you. If you take your sin with you then you will just have more death. Leave your sin here. Accept the gift of life. Stop dying. Start living!

Then Jesus turned to the crowd, the watchers, and said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Jesus was describing eternal life. If you have Jesus you live in a world that is lit up with truth, His truth. It is with Him, being where He is that truth is found. And you love Him and you love the truth and you don't want to be anywhere else.

Or think of the woman at the well. A Samaritan woman who found Jesus at the well outside of her town and He asked her for a drink. She was intrigued by the request and frankly put it to Jesus with words that in effect were, what's going on here? I know better than to speak with You or have anything to do with You. But Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink.' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

Then, Jesus defined "living water." "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

If we could interpretively translate the rest of the conversation it might go like this:

The woman: Let me have the water you're talking about - give it to me right here and now

Jesus: Call your husband.

The woman: I don't have a husband.

Jesus: Well said, since you have had 5 husbands and the man you are with now is not your husband. You see, the water that I'm talking about is not for you unless you change.

The woman: How can I trust you? You and I, we have different traditions. We worship in different places.

Jesus: The time is coming and in fact, it is here, when true worshippers will worship God in spirit and in truth regardless of how or where they grew up. The Father is seeking these people right now and that is why I am here. God is Spirit and to worship Him, you must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

The woman: I know that the Messiah is coming and when He comes I think that He will talk like you talk.

Jesus: Yes, this is who I am!

The woman: (to the villagers) Come out here to the well and meet a man who told me my whole life story. Come and meet Him! I have found the Messiah!

The Egyptian experience of Israel says it all. Egypt was for them the land of slavery and death. Living without Christ is life in the land of slavery and death. Slavery speaks to our bondage and death speaks to the harm that we bring upon ourselves and others. Think of the many ways that we chain ourselves up by indulging in our addictions or by giving in to fears that stand in the way of growth and achievement that could change our lives and expand our ability to be a blessing. This is slavery and death. It is drinking water that can only satisfy very briefly before we need to come back for more again and again and again. It is a cycle that has no apparent end until Jesus comes to town and offers something better. Living water that will become a fountain of water springing up into

everlasting life... Walk with Jesus. Accept Him as the Christ. Believe in Him and in His ways. Leave your old life behind. Find His glory in His presence and revel in Him. Trusting Jesus that is all!

So Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent will lift you out of the land of slavery and death. Life will become free and what you experience will be real living. Learn the power of love. Experience the excitements of purpose and significance. Know the certainty of truth. Anticipate a future that is nothing less than the blessed hope of the coming and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will receive eternal life (right now) It is the full and abundant life that God gives through Jesus Christ our Lord.