

# Eternal Life

A sermon in the series  
Life in the Son

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, March 3, 2013  
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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I John 5:11-13, 20

***And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. <sup>20</sup> And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.***

The Apostle John is concluding his epistle and he summarizes the theme that has been his theme throughout his whole writing—Jesus Christ is both God and Savior. He writes for the distinct purpose that you may know you have eternal life and that those of you who believe in Jesus' name will continue to do so. I'm thankful for this epistle because it speaks to me. As I was reading those words to you I was reading them to me as if John had freshly pinned this book and handed it to me personally. *I'm writing these things for you, Michael, so you will know you have eternal life and because you believe I want you to continue in believing. That's why I sat these five chapters down here.* One of the unique things that John does in our text as he's bringing this epistle to a conclusion is clearly state that salvation and the Christian life is about having Jesus and not just a religious experience. Look at verse twelve again,

*“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

There are many religions that teach that you must have an experience in order to have eternal life. Christians aren't the only ones who teach this. There are some in the Islamic faith that believe in religious experiences. Hindus believe in having religious experiences as well as Buddhists, so we're not alone. Therefore, an experience may or may not lead to eternal life. It has to be the right experience. Many today are advocating that the only experience you need in order to be a Christian is to walk forward at the conclusion of the service and have an experience with a counselor or pastor. The experience is essentially pray a prayer and then you are eternally saved.

We heard a man yesterday who did not know the Gospel at all, not at all. I questioned him about

it afterward and said, “Let me make sure I understood. You sat down on a pew before the service had begun?”

He said, “That’s correct.”

“You hadn’t heard the preacher preach yet?”

“That’s correct.”

“Have you ever heard the Gospel message?”

“Not that I can remember, maybe in jail but I really didn’t know a whole lot about it and then the next thing I knew I was on the altar, broken before God and I opened my eyes and I was different.”

That’s amazing! It’s exciting to hear that God can save that way. But what saddened me was that he went on to share that sometime later a pastor whom he really respected allowed him to share his testimony in the church and after he shared that testimony the pastor contradicted it and said, “He didn’t mean it that way, because the only way you can get saved is by making a decision for Jesus.”

Beloved, I feel angry when I hear things like that. I have to remember that I was like that—blind, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. We must be patient and forbearing knowing that God can be merciful to open the eyes of even preachers. But making a decision is not the religious experience that John was talking about.

I made hundreds of decisions before I was truly converted. My parents were not Christians when I was young, but I remember we would always watch the Billy Graham Crusades whenever they came on television. I remember they always preempted Gunsmoke or Bonanza or whatever I really wanted to watch, so I had no choice because we only had one black and white TV in the house. I’d listen to the preacher with the North Carolina accent. Then I’d watch the thousands come and he would lead those watching by television in a prayer and I would pray that prayer every time I watched that telecast.

I remember finding Chick tracts. Anybody remember Chick tracts? They looked like cartoons but were Gospel tracts. I remember finding one called *GI Joe*, of course it was during the Vietnam War, and it was about a GI in Vietnam who made fun of this Christian soldier. Both of them get killed in the war and one of them stands before God as a saint and enters into eternal life and the other, the one who always made fun of the Christian, was standing before the throne and these two big angels have him by the arm and he is condemned for all eternity. On the back of that tract was always a prayer: “Dear Jesus, I am a sinner, please come into my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.” And you could write the date down. Man, I would always pray that prayer and write the date.

I made a lot of decisions for Jesus Christ but it was not until Jesus Christ encountered me that I changed. He didn't just give me an assurance or peace of mind, He gave me Himself and that's what John says true Christianity is. It is the encounter and the possession of the person of Jesus Christ into your life. You possess Christ and if you possess Christ you possess life everlasting. You have eternal life because Jesus is Eternal Life.

## **I. ETERNAL LIFE IS MORE THAN LIFE EVERLASTING**

That doesn't mean eternal life is not life everlasting.

### **A. Eternal Life is Life Everlasting.**

To have eternal life is to live forever and ever with God. There are verses that use eternal life to mean life forever, for example John 10:28,

*“And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”*

I'll never forget when that verse became real to me. I was getting ready to debate a Baptist pastor because, while I had come to believe a great deal of biblical doctrine after my conversion, I, at this time, hadn't come to understand the perseverance and the security of the believer. I was getting ready to debate a Baptist pastor when Jesus came and debated with me. Now how to you debate with Jesus? It's a losing proposition. You might as well gargle with gasoline and spit in a fire because you're not going to win. My argument was some of this sermon because I was partly right, eternal life is more than just life without end, it's a quality of life and that was going to be my point. At that time I believed that eternal life, was only a quality of life but it didn't mean that it could not end; you could walk away from Christ. Nobody can take you away, pluck you out Christ's hand, but you could choose of your own will to walk away. That was my view. But God came and debated with me and said, “Yes, but I said ‘that they may never perish,’ and that ought to take care of that.” And I said, “Yes Sir, it does.”

Everlasting or eternal life means to live without end in the eternal bliss of God. There are other verses that refer to eternity to mean the opposite of a life separated from God.

*“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46)*

This explains eternal life is not the number of years or endless ages but the quality. It's life with God, enjoying the blessings and life with God rather than eternal torment and death.

But John uses eternal life in a different way.

## **B. Eternal Life is a Person.**

Specifically, Jesus.

John began this epistle this way:

*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—” (1 John 1:1-2)*

Clearly he calls Jesus by the title Eternal Life and now he ends his epistle the same way. Like two bookends, John proclaims that Jesus is Eternal Life.

*“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” (1 John 5:11)*

*“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20)*

Make no mistake about it—Jesus is eternal life, so I believe that if John were pressed to define eternal life he would say:

### **Eternal Life = Participation in the very life of Jesus**

It's sharing in the life of Jesus Christ who is God, because Christ is eternal by nature.

## **II. THE ETERNITY OF JESUS**

I don't know what eternity is and since I don't know how to define eternity I really don't know what to tell you about it, but I'm not too concerned because I know you don't know what it means either. But I do know this, it's the opposite of time.

### **A. The Doctrine of Time.**

Time is a doctrine as well as an invention of God. Man's whole existence is contained within the category of time. We live in time. Time is that fourth dimension which measures the change of our existence. If there were no changes in life, no sequential events there would be no time because time is the measurement of events and the change that occurs within. Everything that a man does is conditioned by time; everything you do is affected by it. Therefore to speak of a mode of existence that is not conditioned by time is just quite incomprehensible by our finite,

time-oriented and conditioned minds.

Let me give you a few examples of what I'm talking about.

### **Man's biological development**

We were talking earlier about DNA and how God brings a man and woman together and thus creates a separate human being. A man is born and he grows into adulthood and finally old age and then there's not much left and he sinks into the grave. Death comes. It's a sequential pattern. Do you see it? Birth, growth, adolescence, adulthood, old age, and death.

### **Intellectual development**

When you're born you do not know one syllable of one word. You don't know language, you can't communicate with your parents. But then we do learn a word or two and then other words are added. We learn to string a few words together and get out a phrase and then finally sentences and then we learn to read that sentence. We go to school and high school and post-secondary education and then in the providence of time some lose all that they've learned to become vegetables at the end and then have to be cared for as when they were a baby. That's the march of time.

The way we divide time is interesting, isn't it? Past, present and future. A sequential way of defining it. Most of us think we're moving into the future, but the truth is the future moves toward us. Some of you now must think I've watched too many Star Trek movies when I was a kid, but it's true—time approaches us. It's like looking down a railroad track and seeing a train come toward you. That's the future and it makes it's way down the track and now it's whizzing by you, that's the present and now it's passed you and is further down the line, that's your past. That's how we're moving, the future is moving toward us. That's how time works.

If you don't understand what I'm trying to say, think about this. Have you ever been jogging or riding a bike or just taking a walk with a group of people and notice those who like to run or bike or walk a little faster? The group that likes to run faster get out there ahead of you, sometimes you can't see them any more? Then there is a group way back behind you and you can't see them either.

But what if someone was perched high in elevation like on a plane, they could see the entire road. They could see the group that was ahead; the group in the middle group, and also the group that was behind. That's what time is to God. God can see the future, He sees the present and He sees the past altogether. That's the eternity of Christ.

### **B. Christ's Eternality.**

**Eternality = A state of being**

God is eternal, it's His nature, it's an attribute of God. God does not dwell in eternity, because He is eternal. We think of eternity as being time going on before, in the past, without end and time going on in the future without end, but that's not eternity. That's linear thinking, conditioned by time, one event after another. God is above all of that—He can see the past and the present and the future, it's all the same and it's all present with God. Listen to what the Bible says about God and His eternity.

*“Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” (Psalms 90:2)*

Why does David say that? It sounds like he contradicted what I said wasn't eternity. From everlasting to all the way back without beginning and all the way to the future without end. David is restricted by human language. It is the only way humans can discuss eternity because we're so conditioned by time. It's the only way we can think. But you're going to see something in a few moments that will show this is just an evidence of our limitation.

*“Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.” (Psalms 93:2)*

You are from eternity. Before God ever created an angel, much before He created heaven and earth, He was.

*“Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will have no end.” (Psalms 102:25-27)*

The writer of Hebrews said this is speaking of Jesus and His eternity. All of creation will change but Christ will not change, “Your years will have no end.” In other words, eternity is closely related to God's unchangeableness. There is no measurement of time in God's existence. No past, no present, no future. God doesn't have a past and God doesn't have a future, because He doesn't dwell in time He transcends it. He's above it and therefore God is not bound by it. In Revelation 1:8,

*“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

In those words we hear something, *was*, *is* and *is to come*. It sounds like He has a past, present and future, but God is trying to tell us something about His eternal nature—He is the ever-present now. The ever-present now who can see the future and the past and the present all in His existence. I know I've got some of you lost, so let me try to break it down to the most simplest concepts.

**I. To say Jesus is Eternal Life is to say that God is not temporary.**

Aren't you thankful we serve a God who isn't going to go off the throne? I wouldn't want to serve a God that's got an end date of when His term has been served and He has to step down. No, there is no expiration date with God, He's not a temporal God He is eternal.

## **2. God is not created.**

*"I Am who I Am."*

He was saying to Moses not only that is He holy but He is the ever-present now. It's always present with God. He's not created.

This is hard for us to grasp. Every time I try to do it I get nervous and I quit. The reason I get nervous is that I cannot accept a self-existent cause. I can't accept something that doesn't have a beginning, yet God says He has no beginning. My problem is that I'm thinking linearly, thinking back a million years then another million years, and I go back so far my mind starts spinning. I can't find God's beginning, but I'm thinking with time and you can't think that way. God always was.

The reason we can't think of God like that, linearly, is because God created time. C.S. Lewis illustrated it this way. It's like a clean sheet of paper going off in infinite directions and you take a pencil and you draw a one-inch line, the beginning point is the beginning of time and the end point is the end of time. That's what time is to God. It's like a little line on an infinite sheet of paper, but God is the sheet of paper. He's the eternal one who created time.

## **3. God is unchanging.**

God is the Being that transcends. *Transcendent* means above something, unattached. God made everything and He's not apart of anything He made, He's transcendent above it, which means He can control everything. He can control your life, my life, everyone's life because He's not dependent upon what He made; everything He made is dependent upon Him. God is transcendent of time, He's not attached to it, He's not bound to it. He can enter in it and at the same time be out of it.

I don't apologize for this message. I know some of you are weary of it because it's taxing you and you don't like to think, but I don't apologize because really these are things the Bible teaches and you need to hear this. Because the more you understand of God the bigger your God gets and the bigger your God gets the more you can see and the more you see of Him the more you are filled with the awe and wonder of worship. So just hold on with me.

God is not conditioned or captured by time. Therefore we say He's eternal because He's unchanging. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever" and because God never changes He could not have been created. To be created means a big change, nonexistent now existent. That's huge change. But God is unchanging. He's never changed and He cannot have a beginning.

And if He has no beginning He has no past and no future. Before anything was made there was God and that's the best I can do. You just have to accept that He was.

#### **4. God is absolute.**

One of the significant facts about God's eternity is that we worship a God who is absolute. Your faith rests upon One who cannot be moved by the confusion of men. You have One who is forever settled, steadfast, unmovable. The actions of others do not sway Him in the least. He is absolute. He is eternal. That's Jesus.

Now you know why I'm so amazed by the incarnation. Here is One who has no past, no present, no future, the ever-present now. He's transcendent of time, He invented time, He is not bound by time and yet He enters time. He enters time and the infinite does not cease to be infinite, He simply adds finiteness. Oh my, what a God! What an amazing God!

One last thing, John is not just saying Jesus is eternal life because He's eternal life, but that eternal life is a quality of existence. It describes a way or a kind of life. Eternal Life, which is Jesus, is more than a concept of timeless existence, but also a quality of existence. Eternal life is the participation or sharing in the life of Jesus Christ who is God.

Let's just stop and think of all the things we just said about Him and His eternity. He's immutable, meaning He's unchangeable. You and I now possess Eternal Life, which means we don't have to die in order to start eternal life, we have it right now. "*They that believe on Me,*" Jesus said, "*they shall never die.*" Why? Because they have been given Eternal Life the very moment they received Christ. You possess Him, He possesses you and now your quality of life will go beyond the grave and you now share in the unchangeableness of God. You are in union with someone who cannot be changed by the circumstances that concern you. You are able to move into steadfastness, into immovability as you drink and taste of the life of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians that they were to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." How can shiftless, weak, ever-changing beings like you and me be resolute, absolute, steadfast and immovable as we participate in the life of Christ? Only by participating in His unchangeable life.

**His love.** God's love is infinite, eternal love and the quality of life that I now have because I possess Jesus is the love of God that is so powerful and so infinite that it fills my little cup and your little cup and all of our cups until the world should be drowning in the love of God. That's the kind of life we are participating in, the eternal love of God. So now I can love people who are unlovable, I can love my enemies, I can pray for those who persecute me, and I can bless them who do evil.

**The humility of God.** Can you think of the humility of God? Here comes Jesus Christ, the infinite eternal one and He becomes a man, He condescends.



Oh dear friends, I was reading the other day when Gabriel entered into the temple when Zacharias was offering the incense. Gabriel revealed to Zacharias that he and Elizabeth would have a child. The old priest didn't believe it and as you read the account you can sense the indignation, the disrespect that Gabriel felt. He says,

*"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."*

Here is Gabriel, a mighty and beautiful being, who, if he appeared to us today, we would be tempted to worship because he is so beautiful. But do you realize that God the Father has to humble Himself to even allow Gabriel to be in His presence? God has to humble Himself to hear songs of praise and adoration of this angelic creature? The reason is God is infinitely better than any angel. Angels are finite, but God is not.

**The graciousness of God.** Here is the life of Christ, eternal life, a gracious life. He doesn't always give us what we deserve, and thank the Lord. He does not consider us according to our iniquities, He is forgiving and omnipotent and this is the life from which we draw from right now, not just in heaven. It's the well in which you and I should be drinking from. Every believer in this room should never whine again nor complain because we are drinking from a well that satisfies. It's an eternal well. But on this earth there are many boundaries, laws and inhibitors that keep us from being able to enjoy Him more. Heaven is going to remove a lot of those boundaries and inhibitors, but because we're finite our eternal life that we've been given, the life of Christ, must last forever for two reasons.

1. **Because He's eternal.**
2. **It has to last forever because the divine quest of experiencing His fullness will take forever.**

I don't know if I can explain what I'm thinking. *Lord, help me.* If this Being that transcends time and is infinite and is so wonderful that we don't know how to define Him, how could you exhaust His fullness? Where do you begin with God? How do you find His end? You cannot find beginning or end for there is neither with God. He has no future and no past.

Finally, when we arrive in heaven and have the beautiful experience of seeing God in a way we've never seen Him before, do you think you'll be able to drink in all there is of God in one moment's glance? In one look upon His face? Absolutely not. You're going to experience satisfaction but not fulfillment. There will still be longing because God is eternal and there is never an end to His joy and pleasures.

*"In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand pleasures forevermore." (Psalm 16:11)*

Billy Graham spoke in Heringey, England many years ago and one of those who heard him and

became a follower of Christ at the end of those meetings was a well-known medical doctor who had become an uncontrolled alcoholic. He was destroying his life and found himself hopeless. He begged people for help but could not find it, and one evening he went to the Crusade where he surrendered his life to Christ. A few weeks later his buddies looked at him and said, "You know what, we don't recognize you anymore. You're a different man. What's happened to you?" He then shared with them what happened.

Later, after a very difficult day, one of the associate doctors followed this man into his office and shut the door and said, "I want to ask you a question. I promise you I will not repeat this conversation, nobody is in the room, we're all alone, the door is locked. Would you please tell me something? You've had a miserable day and I know your past life with its struggles and certain habits. I also know that you used to keep behind your medical journals one of the finest bottles of scotch that a man could buy. There is nobody in here the doors are locked, we're all alone, are you going to tell me you're not going to reach out and pour some of that into a glass and drink it?"

The doctor looked at him and said, "Everything you said could happen, except one thing and that therefore changes the decision."

"What's that?" the man asked.

"Since I've come to know Christ," the doctor responded, "I have found that I am never, ever alone."

You are never alone. I'm never alone because God is eternal. He's not bound by time or space. He can be with you and with me in two hemispheres at the same time and because He is not limited or bound by time He watches over you without sleep or slumber. You are never ever alone because you have eternal life, you have Jesus and Jesus is not bound by this thing called time.

We were made for eternity. There is a residue of the image of God remaining with each of us that makes us to long for a land that is not ruled by time. We were made for a way of life that is marked by the Divine and until we are there we are never going to quite feel at home. Eternal life is not just life without end but a quality of life that you will never want to end. That's eternal life.

*"Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?'" (Matthew 19:16)*

*"Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (Matthew 19:21-22)*

The young man wanted eternal life and Jesus said "Sell all you have and come follow Me and you will have eternal life." That young man's life was defined by what he possessed. That's why he went away sorrowful. His wealth is what he valued more than anything else. It possessed him and

therefore he was defined by his wealth.

The question comes to us all, sometimes in the silence of the night when you cannot sleep the question is there—how do you define your life? What are you living your life for? Do you, like the young rich ruler, define your life by your wealth, your achievements, your successes, your family? Tell me, how do you define your life?

Christ is asking you to define your life by Him. Would you be willing right now to let Christ define your life? Would you be known by the name of Jesus? Would you allow the signature of Christ to be written on your soul? Are you willing for everything you do, even your very life to be stamped with His image? Would you enter into a realm of life that has the aroma of eternity on it? I pray you will. Because if you do not possess Jesus you do not have eternal life. Amen.