

Take hold of real life: eternity

Lesson: **John 3:11-17**

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203:11-17>

Two weeks ago, we celebrated Easter. Easter is that day, around 2,000 years ago, when God rolled away the rock from the door of Jesus' tomb and Jesus emerged, a new creation — not merely revived, but resurrected. Jesus came out of the tomb a new being — the same person, but newly created, differently constituted.

There can be no doubt that the resurrection was a pretty exciting moment of divine pyrotechnics. But the resurrection of Jesus wasn't merely a Technicolor display of God's power over physics. Easter wasn't simply God's way of nudging us out of apathy. Jesus' resurrection matters because through Jesus — through faith in him and following his way — God gives us resurrection too. God give us new life. When you choose to believe, when you choose to center your life in God, when you choose to follow the Way of Jesus, God resurrects you too. You come out of your tomb. You become a new being — the same person, but newly created, differently constituted. You get a really real life.

What does that mean: a real life? What does a resurrected life look like?

Over the next six weeks, between now and the day known as the Pentecost, we're going to be talking together about taking hold of real life — about what a resurrected life looks like. We're looking at six characteristics of a resurrected and real life: eternity, wholeness, wisdom, fruitfulness, focus, and gifts. Each of these is part of that real life you gain when you choose to believe in Jesus as Christ and to follow his way.

Today we're talking about eternity — eternal life. In the gospels — the first four books of the New Testament that tell the details of Jesus' life and teachings — Jesus talks of eternal life 24 times. The promise of eternal life is a strong theme in Jesus' teachings, and in the passage we read today, from the gospel of John, that promise is made clear: Jesus was sent into the world and lifted up as a sign of God's saving power, so that everyone who believed in him would have eternal life.

John restates the promise 3 times in the 6 verses we read today: God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

What is this promised life? What is life-in-eternity?

There are three parts to eternity — to eternal life through Jesus:

- 1) Life after death.
- 2) Life on God's time.
- 3) Life in heaven on earth.

1) Eternal life is life after death: God gives each of us a place in God's presence for the rest of time and beyond time through our faith in Jesus. God gives each of us a place in heaven through our faith in Jesus.

How many of you believe in heaven? Would admit it to your unchurched friends? It's not sophisticated to speak of heaven as a real thing. We scoff at streets paved with gold and choirs of angels singing. But the fear of death is a real thing, isn't it? Death feels shameful, like a failure of will. We hide it as we would hide a secret shame. We grieve poorly, and talk about death in disguised terms. Even at funerals, we tie our tongues in knots so as to not speak of death. Nearly every memorial I've done the family has asked

for it to be a “celebration of life.” But it is death, after all. And every single one of us will die. As the Doors song says “no one gets out of here alive.”

Jesus takes our fear of death out of the darkness and speaks openly about it. In John chapter 14, Jesus speaks of the many rooms in our Father’s house, and that he is preparing one of them for us. Jesus tells us that we do not need to be afraid of death, because we have a place to live after death. We have a place with God, forever.

I don’t know where you are on this today, but I have absolute confidence in life after death. I believe in life after death because eternity is not a future thing, but a dimension of all that is (we’ll talk more about that in just a minute). I believe because the accounts of Jesus’ resurrection are numerous and somewhat inconsistent. They reflect hundreds of human beings accounting the truth of their experience of a miracle. Hundreds of people saw and spoke and ate with Jesus after his resurrection. The gospel accounts are so vivid, and the witnesses so incredulous – the disbelief and struggle of the witnesses is so clear – that I’m forced to believe. And since then, so many have experienced the risen Christ, including people among us.

Moreover, every day people slip into God’s perspective and return to our own. We call these experiences “near death” or “clinical death” experiences, where people see at once what is going on around them and what is going on inside and beyond them. When they return, and tell of what they have seen, they are no longer afraid. Let me be clear: it is not their stories that help convince me. It is their peace.

2) Eternal life is life on God’s time. Sometimes we try to make sense of the Genesis creation story – you know, the earth in six days – by asking “what is a day to God?” We mean that God’s days must be much longer than ours, because God lives so much longer. But God’s time isn’t about length of days, as though God just chops up linear time into longer sections than we do. God’s time isn’t linear; God’s time isn’t time or timely. Eternity – God’s time – is all of it, all at once. “In the beginning” is “forever and ever, amen” and right here, right now. God is alpha and omega, beginning and end and now, all at once. So where we see linearity, God sees wholeness.

I’ve really been helped by quantum physics on this one. I’m not a physicist, and don’t pretend to understand it very well, but the more we know the more it seems that linear time – time as counted by minutes, years, pages, dots on a timelines, pictures in an album – isn’t the whole story. The more clearly physics imagines time and space, the more it aligns with the Biblical understanding of God’s time. That 11-dimension stuff is awfully similar to what we faith folks call *kairos*, or God’s time. That linear perspective that is measured by clocks and calendars we call *chronos*.¹

When we practice faithing, when we practice living in the purpose and position of God, we begin to gain a sense of *kairos*, of God’s time. We gain a Godly perspective, which includes both our momentariness and a lens onto the whole of time, space, and meaning at once. Our notion of “now” changes and our notion of “eternity” changes.

If *kairos* is God’s time – the wholeness of time – heaven is God’s place – the wholeness of being. That means that “heaven” is not a discrete place, separate from earth in some kind of spatial way. Heaven is not a place that will happen in the future someday. Heaven is a dimension of time and space that is happening now. God sometimes allows eternity – *kairos*, heaven – to seep into our lives. Call it a divine leak, if you will. There are moments in our lives when we glimpse heaven, the eternal, and the miraculous. God’s perspective. Those beyond-death experiences are glimpses into that dimension. We cannot see heaven, but by believing in the resurrection (Jesus’ and ours) and by practicing faith, and by following the Way of Christ, we can experience heaven. We may experience heaven through Christ now.

¹ See my sermon dated 10/13/04, *Living in God’s Time*, for a more thoroughgoing discussion of *kairos*.

We may live on God's time, with an eye looking through God's perspective. So heaven is not just happening now for those who have died. Heaven is happening now for us. Which leads us to the third meaning of eternal life...

3) Eternal life is life in heaven on earth.

When we live on God's time, our lives gain purpose in God's world. Sometimes people call this "God's plan", but it's not a plan like we make plans. God's plan isn't a series of action items laid out end to end, fulfilling a strategy to achieve a goal. That's a timebound linear methodology for us timebound linear critters. God's plan is the whole of God's intention for God's universe lived out in each moment in each place. We, and our lives, have meaning to the whole when we live them according to God's intention for us and for the world.

Our lives have meaning when we live them according to God's intention for us and for the world. Our lives have purpose, because we are intended to live out heaven on earth. That means that your life is valuable and meaningful not just to your family and friends, but in the whole of eternity. Because of eternity, you matter.

Last week, Craig spoke about how God's intention was that we live in God's earth with the power to maintain and replenish it. We are a critical part of the earth's ability to be Eden — to be God's heaven now. We ignore that ability and abuse God's earth, but, as Craig taught, God gave us the power and the responsibility to make heaven here. That is, to bring the eternal place to this place, making this place eternal.

Every week, we pray the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, and they taught their disciples, and they taught us. It's such an important prayer that we print it in the program — the bulletin — each week, and teach it to our children. Take a look at the words: Our father in heaven, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are created, called, and empowered to pierce the veil between heaven and earth, not by leaving the planet prematurely, but by making earth more like heaven. Heaven, remember, is where God lives, God is central, and God's will is lived out. We are intended to live out heaven on earth, by living out God's will for our lives.

We spoke earlier about why you might reject eternal life. Sometimes folks reject the notion of heaven — life after death — because it requires them to look at their lives. Living in eternity makes you really look at your life right here, right now. Living out God's will is not just Option C if you're choosing eternal life. If what Jesus says about heaven is true, if thousands of people's experience of the risen Christ is true, if their testimony of their own new lives is true, if our own experience of joy and miracle is true, if any of that is true, then the rest of it is likely to be true, too. That means that if we are living our lives for our selves, spending more time with us at the center than God at the center, if we're claiming Jesus' eternity but not following his way, something is awry in our relationship with Jesus.

A lot of us reject accountability, to God or anyone else. Because we've rejected the image of the vindictive, mean, nasty, punishing God, we've also rejected our own accountability. Accountability to God — or to others, for that matter — isn't about getting into heaven after death, or avoiding hell. It's about living in a way that pleases the God who has given us everything, that restores healthy and right relationship among us and with God, and that makes heaven on earth.

Can you trust that faith in Jesus Christ brings the certainty of life after death? So what about his commands and other teachings — can you trust that they have the authority — the realness — to guide and shape your life?

If you looked at your life through the God lens, would you see yourself trying to live your life from eternal values and purpose? Would you see yourself striving to put your faith to work in your daily decisions and relationships? Are you valuing and loving yourself and others? Are you helping make heaven on earth?

When you take hold of real life, you take hold of a life that is eternal and abundant. It is a life that conquers the fear of death, a life lived on God's time, and a life of heaven on earth. If you're not living a real life now, will you take hold of real life now? Will you this moment re-center your heart and mind and strength on eternity?

It's not as hard as you think. Just ask God to show you how. Let God take your unbelief and grow it into trust. Then, act "as if". Act as if you will experience answered prayer, and you will. Act as if you can restore heaven on earth, because you can. Act as if Jesus' promise is for you – that "whoever believes will have eternal life" is for you – because it is. Act as if you matter, because you do. Act as if you have eternal value, because you do. Act as if God's in Christ loves even you, and that God's care for you will never run out, because it won't.

Take hold of real life today, by recommitting to living eternally, now. Recommit each day, with a prayer like this: Lord Jesus, our Christ, thank you for showing me what life looks like when it is lived with God. Thank you for showing me heaven, after death, and on earth. Thank you for not expecting me to be perfect. I am coming to you to ask for your Spirit's help in realigning my life to my faith. I believe in you. I trust the promises you have given and will try my best to live your teachings as I understand them. Make me a disciple, Lord, and help me feel your eternal love in my bones. Amen.