

ETERNAL LIFE

A sermon by Laurence New on Sunday 8th January 2023.

I want to talk briefly this morning about Eternal Life – what it is; how we enter into it; what impact it has on our earthly lives; and conclude by looking at our duty as believers to help others to find eternal life.

1. What is Eternal Life? The most explicit definition of Eternal Life, as we have just heard in the Gospel reading (John 17 vv 1-9) was given by Jesus in His Prayer on the night before His crucifixion. He said...

“And this is Eternal Life, that they know you Father, as the only true God, and [me] Jesus Christ whom you have sent”.

Picture the scene. Jesus is with his disciples in the upper room. They have finished the last supper Jesus has been giving what has become known as his Farewell Discourse, a lengthy rehearsal of all that He has taught them. And finally, He prays what has become Known as His High Priestly Prayer.

The impact of this evening on His disciples must have been enormous. Twenty years later - we think in AD 53 - John, one of the youngest of the disciples, is writing his first letter to the believers in Corinth . **“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have Eternal Life.”** (1 John 5:13)

Some years thereafter he is writing His Gospel s, sometimes referred to as the Spiritual Gospel. It differs from the other synoptic Gospels who suggest that eternal life is only to be experienced after our death. John, however, insists that eternal life is a "present possession" in this life. We can see why John does so if we look again at the High Priestly prayer, where Jesus uses the present tense , **“And this is Eternal Life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**

2 .What do we have to do to experience Eternal Life?

Again the answer is evident in Jesus’s High Priestly Prayer. Jesus said **“I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have come to know the truth, that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me”**

The answer couldn’t be clearer . We have access to Eternal Life when we truly believe on Jesus, and that He was sent by God the Father.

3. How should the possession of Eternal Life change us?

Eternal Life is a life of quality (not longevity as suggested by the translation ‘everlasting life). Eternal Life is an abundant life, equipping us with the fruit of the Spirit - (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control); We can hope for

at least one of the nine gifts of the spirit (as God chooses to allocate them. Perhaps the most fundamental of them is the gift of faith. Eternal life brings a willingness to witness, the gift of trust, the gift of peace and - perhaps most precious personally - the gift of rejoicing whatever our circumstances. We heard it described this morning in our second lesson "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say Rejoice. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4 vv 4-9). Thanks to the Barnabas Fund we hear regularly how Christians in Islam-dominated countries exhibit this ability to rejoice despite horrendous persecution.

John's insistence that Eternal Life is here and now is also vitally important because without it there can be no Eternal Life hereafter. As we have discussed many times in this church, at the death of our minds and bodies, which were the gift of our parents, our soul which is the gift of God passes back to Him. (Ecclesiastes 12 v7). That soul of ours will spend the intermediate years between our death and Christ's Second coming, either in Paradise or in torment (Matthew 7 vv 13 and 14). If we have received Eternal Life on earth our soul will be allowed to enter paradise with Christ. If we have not received Eternal Life on earth our soul will spend all those intermediate years in Hades in torment, described so graphically by Jesus in his Parable of Lazarus and the Rich man (Luke 16 vv 19-26).

4. Why do so few possess Eternal Life?

Why have we, who believe, failed so disastrously to bring our friends and neighbours to a firm faith.? Why are so few people around us blessed with Eternal Life? The statistics are appalling. We are told that 95% of Britons under twenty-five are no longer members of a church and have no Christian faith. A recent survey revealed that in England and Wales more people identify themselves as Muslims than as Christians. What has gone so devastatingly wrong? Surely the answer is that neither in the family, the Church nor in our schools and universities are we any longer teaching the Gospel truth. Even in my youth the slide to secularism was well advanced. For seven years I was a boarder at King William's College at Castletown - a Christian foundation. We still had Chapel every day and I loved the singing. But my clearest memory of Christian teaching was to be told by our RE master that we should not believe the miracles in the Bible. He assured us that the feeding of the five thousand could be easily explained; they had all brought sandwiches but kept them concealed so that they would not be expected to share with those who hadn't! Jesus walking on the water wasn't a miracle either; Jesus was so familiar with the Galilee that he knew where the rocks were just under the surface! I emerged from College – albeit confirmed by the Bishop of Sodor and Man, – a very uncertain follower of Jesus. As I have mentioned all too often, after a near drowning experience four years later it took me ten years to deliver the promise I made, that if the lord, who I did not know, would save me, I would search for Him and if I could find Him I would serve Him for the rest of my life. When I did eventually come to faith I began a three-year course to become a Licensed Reader, I found that my principal tutor was a modernist, overflowing with Bible Criticism. In order to satisfy him I had to perjure myself in my essays. I was not surprised to find that ordinands

encountered the same problem, because so many British theological colleges and universities are staffed by modernists intent on emphasising asserted textual criticism. An example of this was Dr Thomas Thompson, (1939-2009), an American-born professor who was the author of a widely read book entitled “The Messiah Myth”. He also founded the “Copenhagen School” of philosophy whose mantra is that “The first ten books of the Bible are almost certainly fiction”. Disillusioned by such academics, many young ordinands gave up. Almost more damaging, – many were eventually ordained but fundamentally weakened, preaching a bible that they had been taught not to trust. Cumulatively this is surely the key reason why our pews have emptied.

At the end of my training I nevertheless emerged convinced of the sovereignty and authenticity of the Bible. Written, as it is, by forty different authors living in three continents, over a period of 4000 years, containing some three hundred Old Testament prophecies most of which were fulfilled seven hundred years later in the New Testament, I came to the firm belief that the Bible could only be either the divinely overseen work of God or the most elaborate, detailed, intricately cross referenced, fraud of all time.

5. How can we help others to possess Eternal Life?

Our St Barnabas family, thank God, does **know that we have Eternal Life**. This is not only a great blessing, it is also a great obligation. (Matthew 28 vv 18-20) We have a clear duty to help our families, friends and neighbours **to a firm faith**.. But make no mistake; this will put us at odds with the world. Jesus in His High Priestly Prayer foresaw this, and asked the Father to protect His champions then, and us, His champions, now.

What better way to end the thoughts on Eternal Life than to hear the concluding words of Jesus Christ’s High Priestly Prayer .

Jesus said.

“ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them¹¹ A I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father; keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ²⁰ I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me”. ²⁵ “ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17 vv 15 -26) . Amen.