

## ***YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DIE, DON'T BE AFRAID TO LIVE!***

There are a lot of people, maybe even some who profess to be Christians who are not too sure about heaven. It isn't that they don't believe in heaven, and it isn't that they don't want to go there. For sure they don't want to go to the other place, but the idea of going to heaven isn't exactly exciting to them either. Just why that is the case, at least for some, may be due to the fact that they don't have a really clear idea of what heaven is going to be like. They may be thinking that heaven is going to be like a church service that never lets out! Others really have no idea of what it is going to be like but they have this deep fear that it is going to be unlike anything they will really enjoy experiencing.

I think, part of the problem, at least for some, is that many people have never understood, nor have they really ever experienced what the New Testament speaks of as life. What is life; have you ever thought about that? The dictionary tells me that life is "that state of an animal or plant in which its organs are capable of performing their functions, or have not ceased permanently from performing them." It speaks about something that has existence that is animated. Lots of things exist that do not have life. A bird has life but a rock doesn't have. When God made man, according to Genesis 2:7, we learn that "*the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*" In breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, something happened to what was, just milliseconds before, just a lifeless form made out of dust.

By the time that happened, of course, all sorts of things had come into existence, and a lot of it possessed the quality we call life. There were all sorts of plant life, animals, birds, creatures in the sea, and undoubtedly all sorts of living things that were too small for the human eye. The world had been created in a manner so as to serve as a perfect host for life. But then, something happened. One of the creatures formed, man, took it upon himself to disobey its creator, and from that time forward, even until now, it has been one continuous struggle of life and death. In keeping with the curse God placed upon it, nature turned against the ones who had been given dominion over it. What had begun with such hope and promise soon degenerated into a depressing and destructive fight for survival. In **Job 13:28** that ancient saint who was being battered by the storms made this statement: "*Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.* He went on to say in **14: 1,2**: "*Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. 2) He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not.*

For many people, the fight seems hardly worth it. They do the best they can, often spending their allotted days and years in fear and frustration, making all kinds of vain attempts to avoid the inevitable. Sickness, injury, accidents, wars, cruelty, poverty, aging, and death itself. Compounding all of those things is sin itself, which may present the illusion of making life better, but only leads to a greater slavery. It is no wonder then, when Jesus came and walked among men, he saw all of the misery and unhappiness, foolishness and cruelty that men were suffering and the Bible says he had compassion for them. **Matthew 14**, Jesus and his disciples

made a trip across the Sea of Galilee, and in **verse 14** it says, "*When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*" A little while later, he had that crowd sit down, and with just a handful of bread and fish, he fed them, over five thousand of them, with what may have very well been the best meal any of them had had in a long time. **Matthew 9:36** tells us that when Jesus "...*saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*"

In John 10, Jesus described himself as "the good shepherd." He didn't say, he was "a good shepherd," but "the good shepherd." And He said he came as the good shepherd that the sheep may have life, and have it abundantly. We know He came to seek and save the lost. We know he came to offer Himself as a ransom for many. We know that He tasted death for every man. We know, as Isaiah had prophesied, that "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*"

We know all of that, and we are thankful for it, yes! But Jesus said His coming was also intended to give us life, and not just a meager existence kind of life, but rather, an abundant life! We read that but what do we take from that? Those who are not spiritual minded might read that and think Jesus was talking about a life that's loaded with all kinds of stuff and all kinds of pleasure. Christians might read that and think Jesus was talking about eternal life, and He was, but we need to think about that, what does that mean, eternal life? Does it just mean life without end? Is that what this is all about? Ask a lot of people if they would like to live to be a hundred, and they just roll their eyes! No way do they want to live to be a hundred, much less two hundred, or a thousand years.

Would you want one hundred years more of the trouble and trials you've already been through? Someone says, "Well, if I could have my health and keep my mind, I wouldn't mind another hundred years. Really? Would you want another hundred years to watch your loved ones, on down to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation from now getting sick and dying, going through one problem and crisis after another? Do you want to stick around this old world that seems to be getting worse by the day? Does that sound like a great deal to anyone? I don't think so.

So, no, it isn't the time element that makes life precious to us; it has to do with the quality of that time. It has to do with what time is devoted to; is it something worthwhile, something good, something satisfying? The abundant life, which is eternal life, is not something that is just infinite in duration. It is that, whatever that means in a realm that doesn't need the sun to tell us how long an hour is, or a day or a year. Eternal life is infinite, yes, but it is infinite in the same way that God, who is eternal is infinite.

I think the key to understanding the Biblical concept of life is to see it against the concept of death. But again, we don't have a good grasp of that either, do we? "What is death?" we ask and what comes to our mind is that death is a cessation of life; it's when life stops. And the

Bible does view death in that way. In giving the apostles what we call the limited commission, in Matthew 10, Jesus talked about how they would find themselves opposed by their own family and friends. He said, *“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.”* Jesus healed a young girl, the daughter of a synagogue ruler named Jairus, and in Mark 5, he asked Jesus to do something for her because she was *“at the point of death.”*

So that is one way of understanding death, but what if death is more than that; it isn't just what happens when life stops? What if death is life, but it is life lived under the wrath of God. There's actually a good bit of Biblical teaching that suggests that very idea.

- For example, take **John 5:24**. Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*
- **John** said something similar to that in his **First Epistle**. In **3:14**, he wrote: *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”*
- In **John 8:51, and 52**, Jesus said twice: *“If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”* Well of course, everyone dies in the physical sense. The Bible says that each one of us have an appointment with death—Hebrews 9:27—so Jesus wasn't saying that anyone can somehow avoid going through that.
- In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel you have that story of Jesus being summoned to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus had become ill and his sisters sent word to Jesus who was over in Perea, which was east of the Jordan, in approximately the same area that John the Baptist did much of his work. Jesus delayed going until after Lazarus had in fact died. When he arrived, Martha met him and was understandably upset with Jesus for not coming sooner.
  - **Verse 21**, she said: *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”*
  - In **verse 25**, Jesus said to her, *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*
  - Now, we read that and it makes us want to scratch our head. It sounds like doublespeak to us. *“Though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who believes in me shall never die.”*
  - We know that Lazarus had believed in Jesus, and we know that he died even after being raised by Jesus on this occasion, so obviously Jesus wasn't talking about the physical experience we call death.
- In **Romans 5:14**, Paul said, *“Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”*
- In **Romans 6:13**, he warned Christians to *“...not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have*

*been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

- In **Romans 8:6**, Paul wrote: *“For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”*
- In **2 Timothy 1:10**, Paul spoke about *“the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*

Now, I realize I’m throwing a lot of Scriptures at you, and that may not be all that helpful, but I’m wanting you to see that death in the Bible means more than just your heart stopping, and your brain waves going flatline. In the mind of God, death is the opposite of everything He is. It is the opposite of everything He stands for. Isn’t it interesting how **John** begins his gospel? He says **(1:1-4a)**, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God. 3) All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4) In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

- In **John 5:26**, Jesus says, *“God has life in Himself.”* He then went on to say, *“and He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.”* In **verse 40**, Jesus reproved the religious leaders saying, *“...you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”*
- In **John 6:35**, Jesus said to them, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*
- **John 6:53** So Jesus said to them, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*
- **John 6:54** *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*
- **John 14:6** *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*
- **John 17:3** *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*
- **John 20:31** *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Well, there I go again throwing a bunch of scriptures at you, but do you get the point? If you are a child of God, if you a Christian, if you are really walking the walk, and not just talking the talk, you have already pass from death to life. You have already received eternal life! No you haven’t crossed that vale yet. We call it a vale I suppose because we have to call it something, but maybe for the child of God, it isn’t some dark, foreboding river. Maybe it isn’t terrifying place at all. Maybe it’s like waking up in that beautiful vacation paradise that you planned and scraped to give yourself one time.

No, we haven't experienced that moment when the spirit separates from the body, and while that may be a really difficult moment for the loved ones still on this side of things, but who knows, for the Christian, it may be like getting rid of a toothache.

Listen, would you turn and read something with me? I want to ask you to do that because I want your eyes to see this in God's Book for themselves. I want you to keep in mind Jesus' words from John 10:10, that He came to give you life—not death—and that abundantly. Please open your Bibles to John's first epistle, **1 John chapter 5, verses 11-13**, where John writes these words to us:

*And this is the testimony, that **God gave** (has given; not "will give") **us eternal life**, and this life is in his Son. **Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God **that you may know that you have eternal life.***

Invitation