

"An Eternal Life Lesson from a Seed"

John 12:20-36

We've been exploring the theme 'eternal life' this year, trying to define it and apply it to our lives. We have seen so far that the phrase 'eternal life' describes the quality of life in God now as well as duration of life. Eternal is an adjective that describes life. Eternal life, according to John 3:16, is a gift from God that we receive when we place our faith in His Son Jesus. It is ours the moment we choose to follow Christ and it will continue for eternity. So, if eternal life is something we have now, we need to understand what it looks like now.

Perhaps the best way to understand what eternal life looks like now is to know what it looks like after we die. When followers of Jesus die, we will a) be in the presence of God forever; b) be free from all our sin; and c) never experience pain or sorrow of any kind. And there are many other things but those are biggies. So, if we have eternal life now, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit guaranteeing all that will happen one day. Since we have the presence of the Holy Spirit now, we have the assurance of God's and Jesus' presence with us now and forever. And we can have freedom from sin's power now so we can lead a holy life more than sin-filled life. And, as we'll see in John 12 not the absence of pain or sorrow yet but a new understanding of their purpose in our life, with the confidence that we'll only experience it in this life and never again.

In John 12:20-36, we are in Jesus' last week before His crucifixion. A week prior Jesus brought Lazarus back to life who had been dead for 4 days. Ch. 12 begins with a dinner party at the home of Simon the (former) leper, where Jesus is honoured for His ministry to these people. It's in Bethany (which is 2 miles down the hill from Jerusalem. About the same distance from Foley Mountain to Tim & Dana's house). Many Jews had come to Bethany to catch a glimpse of Jesus and Lazarus. This angered the religious leaders and the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus "*for on account of him many Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in Him*" (12:10). As if the religious leaders weren't angry enough, the next day Jesus rides in to Jerusalem on the donkey where people shout Hosanna and proclaim Him as the Son of David, to save them and for the kingdom to come. And we read this in John 12:17,

Now the crowd that was with Him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. ¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

And to affirm this the next verse says,

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

So now even the Gentiles were inquiring about Jesus and Jesus saw this as a sign from God and announces to His own disciples "*Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*" which as we'll see is referring to His crucifixion.

The Greeks are asking the right question. These were God-fearing Gentiles who came to Passover to worship the God of Israel. They understood the prophecies about a Jewish Messiah. They are wondering if Jesus is the One. Philip and Andrew approach Jesus because they understand

what the Greeks want, they want to follow Jesus. And if we want to have and enjoy eternal life that's the most important question we need to answer for ourselves:

Do We Want to Follow Jesus? **(12:20-22)**

In John's gospel, wanting to see Jesus is equated with following Jesus. Back in Ch. 1 John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and declared "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (1:29). Then he tells about seeing the Spirit come to dwell on Jesus when he baptized Him. In 1:37 we read,

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So coming and seeing Jesus means to follow Him. We also know Jesus understood the Greek's request to see Him as asking to become potential disciples because of His answer. Jesus always made clear to would be followers that to follow Him meant it won't be comfortable (because He had no home to sleep or eat in), it won't be popular (because many powerful people opposed Him) and it could be dangerous and involve suffering as He will explain. It will cost you, in this life, but not in the next. But to follow Jesus and have eternal life means you get to experience His presence and His joy as you pursue His purposes for your life.

And many people stopped pursuing Jesus after He told them these kinds of things. One of the reasons Jesus became one of us was to model what it looks to follow Him as He followed God's plan. To show the risks and rewards of eternal life. Because to follow Jesus means to become like Jesus. This is how Jesus answers the question about would be followers and if you truly want eternal life. His answer to Greeks evokes another question we need to answer:

Are We Willing to Become Like Jesus? **(12:23-30)**

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling Zech. 9:9 and listening to people singing verses from the psalms that were Messianic, many were definitely hoping Jesus was the Messiah. All along Jesus had been saying 'The kingdom is at hand.' The Jews assume Jesus is talking about the time when Israel will defeat all her enemies and be in control. In the Old Testament one of the signs that the kingdom will soon come is when Gentiles also worship God.

But Jesus has been trying to tell them about a different aspect to the kingdom. A spiritual aspect to the kingdom before His physical rule. And that the Messiah must die first. And when Jesus says at the sign of these Gentiles wanting to follow Him, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*" He means His death. We know that from what He says next. But why not say crucifixion? Because Jesus sees the purpose of God through His death.

This is what it means to have eternal life and to follow Jesus;

Seeing life through God's purposes (vv.23, 27-28)

God will glorify Jesus through His suffering and death because He will raise Him from the dead and Jesus will sit with his Father once again in the fullness of His glory. Jesus set aside His glory to

become one of us. Jesus set aside the use of His divine attributes so that He wouldn't use them for selfish reasons; to prevent His death, to seek vengeance on His persecutors and to come down from the cross when taunted. He could have but He chose to deny Himself and accomplish God's purposes so that He could produce a greater harvest of followers than He would have had He stopped the crucifixion.

When we have eternal life we have the ability through the Holy Spirit and through the Word of God to see our life through the purposes of God. Even when we don't know the specifics behind our trials and hurts we always know God is doing two things; He's conforming us more into the image of His Son Jesus and He's wanting to bring glory to Himself.

Once we receive Jesus as Saviour, asking forgiveness of our sins and choosing to follow Him, we now understand our real purpose in life; to make it about God and not ourselves. To glorify God. Why is that our purpose? Because it's God's purpose. God said He's going to fill the whole world with the knowledge of His glory. That won't be completed until all sin is removed but even now it helps us know our purposes in the parts of the world where we live. That each of us is to make our family and home a place where God is glorified. That each of us is to do our part to magnify God in our neighborhoods, work places, classrooms, places of business and recreation. I guess it's just easier to quote 1 Cor. 10:31 at this point and make sure we review our life's purpose each day;

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

This applies to every follower of Jesus in every place in life and at every stage of life and in every circumstance in life – even difficulties. Because Jesus knew that now was the time of His death through which God would glorify Himself. How?

And Jesus answers that question with a very brief parable:

²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Becoming like Jesus means,

Understanding dying/suffering for god is the key to living with God (vv.24-26, 29-30)

As well as glorifying God. Jesus gives an agricultural illustration: the only way you can have a harvest is if a grain of seed of 'dies' in the ground first. The Jewish leaders were looking to put Jesus to death. The Jewish people have dreams in their head of overthrowing the Romans. But Jesus has been trying to tell them He will die first. And after He rises from the dead and the gospel is preached, what group of people will respond to the gospel? The Gentiles will respond more than the Jews. So here Jesus is saying that when the Gentiles start coming to Him it signifies that the hour of His death is near and His death will produce a great harvest for the kingdom – a harvest of more Gentiles than Jews.

Where was it in the Old Testament that said Gentiles would come to the Lord? Isaiah said in Is. 11:10,

¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. ¹¹ In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a

second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

Many Jews didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah because they couldn't understand how His death would be beneficial – even though it was prophesied in the Old Testament. Humanly speaking, that's not how kingdoms are established; by suffering and dying. But Jesus says think about agriculture. If you want fruit you have to let go of the seed and bury it believing by faith that the process of self-denial is the key to a godly productive life. And Jesus explains this principle by using a familiar Jewish analogy of love and hate. When Jesus says we need to 'hate' our life in order to save it He doesn't mean hating ourselves by hurting ourselves and or saying terrible things about ourselves. It's a Jewish way of saying you have to choose one over the other. Elsewhere Jesus says we can't serve both God and money. We must hate the one and love the other is a way of saying only one can have the priority.

When we choose to follow Jesus we change masters. We no longer choose to follow our own will which is wrong and self-driven. Our will is marred by sin and wants us to be the focus of life. Jesus says, let me be Your Master and make me Lord and you'll sin less and enjoy life more because we were wired to serve others in order to find joy. That's why we can never find true joy by selfishly serving ourselves. To love yourself is to choose be safe, to want comfort, to want the acceptance of people, to pursue your own glory and avoid pain and suffering. Jesus says if you try to save your life that way you actually end up losing it because you kept it for yourself. You didn't invest it in anything but yourself.

But if we choose the Jesus way, which means trusting Him to provide our needs, accepting opposition, risking hurt and danger by denying ourselves, we will gain eternal life. We will discover our joy and purpose through serving Him. This is why God audibly answers Jesus' prayer for God to glorify Himself through Jesus' death – to affirm to the hearers and readers that this is God's plan, God's way to experience eternal life.

Jesus then announced that through His death judgment will be meted out on sin and the enemy Satan and that God will draw all kinds of people to Jesus through His being lifted up on the cross.

³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

³⁴ ... "We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

The Jews are wondering if Jesus is the Messiah but they are confused by the mention of His death because they know the Old Testament says the Messiah will reign forever. But they did know that 'lifted up' means death. How do they know that? Back in ch. 3 when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus,

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

They understood that 'lifted up' referred to crucifixion. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a stick, so that the grumbling Israelites who were bitten by snakes, only needed to believe by faith that if they looked up at the bronze snake they would be saved from death.

So Jesus showed from the Old Testament that the hour had come when Gentiles began to believe more than Jews that He would suffer a lifted-up death. Because most Jews didn't understand this they failed to be the light to the Gentiles that God called them to be. We should also ask ourselves,

Are We Being the Lights Jesus Wants us to Be? **(12:31-36)**

How are we Jesus' lights?

Believe justice for our sin has been paid (vv.31-33)

Jesus said sin and Satan were judged at the cross. We are more effective lights when we enjoy the benefits of eternal life now; the power over sin in our life that the Spirit gives us because we believe that Jesus broke sin's and Satan's power over us at the cross. We choose to give sin its power over us when we give in to temptation. But when we walk in the light and trust in the light (Jesus) who paid the price for sin, we can have victory over sin and confidently share the best news available to people; eternal life through faith in Jesus.

Jesus uses the terms 'walking' and 'trusting' in the light (a reference to Himself). To walk in the light means to

Believe Jesus is always with us (vv.34-36)

To walk in darkness is a reference to living with sin controlling your life. You don't know where you're going. You have no direction other than yourself. When Jesus is our light He shows us how to live and assures us of where we're going. To have Jesus as our light means He's always with us showing us the way to live and assuring us of our final destination – His presence.

Eternal life is the assurance now of a future sinless and pain-free life with God forever. That benefit package begins now when we receive Jesus as our Saviour by giving us the ability to have victory over sin since we believe Jesus paid the price and broke the power of sin and Satan at the cross. Eternal life means we have the life of Jesus in us through his Spirit. Through glorifying Him and God more than ourselves we will become more like Him. This helps us understand God's purposes in the difficulties we face in life. God has His purpose in them of glorifying Himself and making us more like Jesus. We need to learn how to respond more like Jesus in them.

Eternal life means as we walk with Jesus in obedience to His Word His light will shine through us and opportunities to talk about Him will come about. And as we do, others will place their trust in Him and our little part of the world is a little bit fuller of His glory.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net