

ETERNAL LIFE



Scripture:

Acts 16:16-40

¹⁶One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. ¹⁷While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, 'These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.' ¹⁸She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the authorities. ²⁰When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, 'These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews ²¹and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.' ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. ²³After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ³¹They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

³⁵When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, 'Let those men go.' ³⁶And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, 'The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace.'

³⁷But Paul replied, 'They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.' ³⁸The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; ³⁹so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

Revelation 22:1-21

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

⁶And he said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.' ⁷'See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.'

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; ⁹but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!'

¹⁰And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.'

¹²'See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'

¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

¹⁶'It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.' ¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. ¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; ¹⁹if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

²⁰The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.



ETERNAL LIFE

This sermon is about the Lord's other prayer, Einstein's other theory and eternal life. You know the Einstein Theory of Relativity. Any school child can quote to you $E=mc^2$. But there is another theory that I have made a graph about on the front of your bulletin.

Is anyone here a mathematician or did you take algebra in school and you know that the X axis and the Y axis that you draw a line going from one place to another to show – that's what this graph is.

Einstein's Asymptote Theory is $Y=1-E$ to the negative X exponent. E is the entity – that's us, the whirling planet – those of us who share this planet Earth. We are an entity and you may be able to see the whirling planet there trying to follow the asymptote line. That is a line, according to this theory, that gets closer and closer to the axis but it never ever touches. So you start far away and you get closer and closer and it seems like it's right up against it, but it's never a parallel line because it always gets closer but never touches.

Kind of like we as Christians in our earthly life want to have eternal life with God, but in this life we may get closer and closer, or think we are, but we never touch it because we are in this life.

In order to get to where we want to be, we have to go through Jesus Christ, and that's a tough thing to do.

THE LORD'S OTHER PRAYER

This is my rendition of Einstein's other theory. I also have my rendition of the Lord's other prayer. You read it together with me from John 17 in the Congregational Prayer. That is Jesus' way of saying to his disciples and to his followers, which includes all of us, that you will be with me and therefore in that manner you will be in God as I am in God.

Now the disciples had a hard time trying to figure this out in their lives. They were with Jesus as followers, students of a teacher, those who followed the rabbi. They had an intense relationship with Jesus. They were interacting on many levels and they listened and they felt the impact of God through Jesus. But there was something different and something very authentic in Jesus that was not in anyone else, and the disciples had the opportunity to live inside of that relationship with God through being with Jesus.

And Jesus loved them into being loving people. He forgave them into being forgiving people.

That's the eternal now that the theologian Paul Tillich talks about – engaging totally with God the way Jesus Christ did.

The reality of Jesus' death keeps being challenged by the reality of the experience of life with him.

EXPERIENCING JESUS ON MANY LEVELS

We as Christians have experience with Jesus Christ on many levels. It may be by reading the Scriptures; it may be by hearing the stories from someone that we trust and love; it may be by having some kind of mystical experience ourselves, perhaps the way the Apostle Paul did, for he is the prototype as a Christian who was not really with Jesus during his earthly life.

Paul had that vision on the road to Damascus that changed him in every way. He became a supporter, a follower of the ideals of Jesus Christ.

Paul went around throughout the known world at that time trying to convince people that Jesus was really the one that we ought to pay attention to because he exemplified God.

And what happened to Paul? He got thrown in prison, he got beat up and he got all kinds of difficulty, but it did not dissuade him from saying that God is the important part of my life and I know through Jesus Christ. But Paul, like us, didn't really live with Jesus. He knew the risen Christ through a vision. We get that vision maybe if we're lucky, or if we're unlucky, because it gets us beat up and thrown in prison and rejected in all kinds of ways. But Paul had that faith.

HEALING POWER

Remember when I talked to you in the last sermon about a month ago about the Apostles and Peter who went around teaching about Jesus after the resurrection even though they were threatened by the authorities and told to stop and they were thrown in prison and they got out and went about preaching any way. The people were so excited about these disciples and their healing power that they would bring the sick out into the open areas so that Peter's shadow might even fall upon these sick people and that shadow would heal them. Such was the extent of their great faith.

The pictures that we draw, the images that we conjure up in our minds can be like that shadow. It's some sort of reflection of who we are or what we think about. It may be light; it may be darkness; it may be a theory that we are trying to approach. It may be a way of getting to know God beyond any other kind of knowing. But that is how we meet Jesus through the entity. It may be communion; it may be a way of saying no to oppression when we see it happening around us. It may be acting upon our own spirituality, that creative force that God puts within each of us that we can express in our own unique ways that gives us the sense of where we are going.

GETTING CLOSE TO GOD

We need to get close to God and we can do that through knowing Jesus Christ, through reading the Scriptures, and seeing what he has done. It may sound too miraculous for a twenty-first century mind, but you need to interpret that in the world view that you have and know that God can even intercede in this life and now, for that is God's will and God's way – to give us Jesus Christ and help us to be the best of who we can be.

UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS

I had a discussion with my wife this week, and it ended up by my asking, "Is there anything else about how God made you that I should know about?" I think that is a good question for each of us to ask. God has made us each unique individuals, but God has put in us a spiritual side that is not necessarily connected to the end of this life. It is something that goes on because to have eternal life, according to Jesus, is to be with God, and that happens in the here and now because as you are here gathered as a congregation to worship God because you know God and you love God. Here we are in this part of eternity and that is eternal life – to know God, to love God and to be the best of who God calls you to be.

YOUR MINISTRY

By God's mercy we are engaged in this ministry. You know what your ministry is. Each of you who has joined this church has been welcomed into the ministry of the church and I see you at work in all kinds of different ways: serving breakfast each morning to the high-school kids next door, putting out help to so many people in feeding the hungry

and encouraging the desperate, in helping the sick. There are so many projects that this church is involved in I would spend more time than I have today to recite them all. But you know what you're doing and you have more ways to serve, so keep up the good work.

By God's mercy we are engaged in this ministry and we do not lose heart. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. The life of Jesus may be made visible in our own mortal flesh. Life is in you. Let your light shine out of darkness and know that God loves you and that your love is going on to all eternity.

John 17: 1-26

¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I

have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

²⁵Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

So there is eternal life, love of God that you have in your community and in your lives to share and to forgive and be the people that God has called you to be.

Let us pray, Thank you Lord God, for all your blessings, for your word to us, for this community of faith, for knowing beyond knowing that you have given us vision, you have given us truth, you have given us hope and you have given us Jesus Christ, your pure spirit in human form to be in the world to have intense interaction with us – in our minds, in our hearts, in our souls that we may know you now and forever. Through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together (The Lord's Prayer). Amen.



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