

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is the Gospel? (Part 2)

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I. Introduction

Christians believe that Jesus gives them eternal life, but what is it? Is it a ticket out of hell? Or is there more to it than that? Does eternal life matter now; can it do anything for me now? Or will I have to wait until I go to heaven to experience paradise with God?

II. The *Goodnews* is that Jesus Gives You Eternal Life.....but what does that mean?

What is eternal life?

It keeps you from hell, at the heart of the Gospel some people see eternal life. And it's true, the *Goodnews* is that Jesus came to give us eternal life. But what is it? Some see it as a ticket to heaven. That is, when you die, you will go to heaven instead of hell because eternal life spares you the final judgment which leads to hell, John 5:24; Revelation 20:11-15. Well and good. But is there more to eternal life than this? By the way, it's interesting that Jesus never really talks about life after death this way, as if hell is a major concern. His focus is mainly on life now, the worries and problems of today, John 4—the woman with several husbands, John 5—a man with a 38-year illness, John 8—the woman caught in adultery, Mark 10:17-22—a rich young man possessed by his wealth. OK, but what do the problems of today have to do with eternal life?

Eternal life is a Person, as we think about what eternal life has to do with today's problems, the first thing we must realize is that eternal life is not an inanimate object; it is not an "it." What saves us from hell is not an "it," it is a "He," a Person, and His name is Jesus Christ, 1 John 1-3.

Eternal life is a personal relationship with God and Jesus, the second thing we must grasp is that eternal life is a relationship. In Ephesians 2:4-6 God tells us that the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, we are united **together-with** Him. We become one with Him. We are so close to Him that we have His Spirit dwelling in us, Romans 8:9-11. Thus, because Eternal Life is a Person and we are in Him and He is in us, Jesus, in John 17 tells us that eternal life is a personal relationship with God and Him, 17:3. And how close do they want this relationship to be? VERY, 17:20-26.

Eternal life also saves us right now, today.....but how? In Romans 5:6-10 it is clear that Jesus' death is what saves us from hell, i.e., reconciles us to God. But it's also clear that it is Jesus' **life** which saves us from God's wrath/discipline for sin right now, (Romans 1:18—note that "wrath" = God's discipline for sin; it's not a reference to hell). Thus, His eternal life saves us right now!

And if we look back at what we lost in the Garden of Eden, we see that we lost our perfect relationship with God and thereby our perfect relationship with each other and everything else. This is what Jesus came to restore to us, which is why in John 10:10 He says that He came to bring us life (which gives us paradise with God in the future). But He also says that He came to give us that life abundantly...right now. But how do we have an abundant eternal life right now?

We have to live in the personal relationship that God gave us in His Son. We have to live every second of our lives with God the Father and His Son, where we are surrounded by His love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace, where He gives us eyes to see everything clearly. But if we live outside of God's love, then we end up in Satan's darkness where He redefines everything for us: God, us, and our lives. And it is also where he blinds us to the truth of where life truly is.

This is what Satan did to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve didn't end up covered with fear and shame because they ate a piece of fruit. They ended up terrified and in the bushes because Satan redefined God, them, and their lives. And Satan tries to do the same to us today. We see this play out in the life of the Prodigal Son. In Luke 15, we have tax collectors and sinners flocking to Jesus; they want to hear what this Rabbi has to say. But there's a problem, the Pharisees and Scribes don't like Jesus hanging out with sinners. In response to their self-righteous and unforgiving hearts Jesus gives them three parables. Each of them, but especially the last one, contains a strong rebuke against the Pharisees. This last parable also has something to teach us about eternal life:

15:4-7, as the shepherd throws a party over his lost sheep who is now found, likewise the scribes and Pharisees should have rejoiced (the way heaven parities) over all these sinners who came to hear Jesus.

15:8-10, just like the woman threw a party over her newly found coin, the scribes and Pharisees should have rejoiced (the way the angels in heaven do) over one sinner who repents.

15:11-24, what the younger son does here is an incredible insult to his father. He doesn't want to wait till his father dies. He wants his inheritance now. He's basically saying to his father, "I want all of this, but I want it without you." Instead of beating him or disowning him, the father grants his wish and gives him a 1/3 of his possessions (the elder son would get two shares and the younger son one, Deuteronomy 21:17). Soon after the younger son takes what is his, leaves for a far country, and quickly squanders everything. If the father is God and home is the Garden of Eden and the son is Adam and the far country is the forbidden fruit, what has the son just done? Where is the abundant life, at home with the father or in the far country? This parable is not simply about a father and two sons. It's about each one of us and whether or not we will live our lives at home with God in the abundant life He has or in a 'far country' without Him.

Now that the son has left the security and love of his father, he runs into a problem. He's out of money, there's a famine, and now he's hungry. What does this Jewish young man do? He goes to work for a gentile feeding his pigs (Deuteronomy 14:8)! Not only that, he would have gladly eaten the pigs' food but no one allowed him to eat their slop. Everything that this young man is doing is absolutely foreign to him. He is not a lowly servant who feeds pigs. He is not one who needs to eat what pigs eat. Far from it, he is the son of a wealthy man with a very comfortable home...but he decided to walk away from his relationship with his father.

The young man comes to his senses; he realizes that his father has many servants who are well-fed and here he is starving, so he decides to return. It may seem that he's only going back for food. He's not; he actually repents for what he's done to his father—he realizes that sin is relational; he has damaged his relationship with his father and sought a home where there was none. He's so repentant that he's willing to be treated as a servant and not a son. As he makes his way to his father's house, his father sees him at a distance and runs to his son (what did God do when Adam and Eve sinned?). Before the son can get a single word out, his father hugs him and kisses him. This entire scene is way out of the norm. In that culture with this kind of disrespectful son, the father would NEVER have run to him. He would've made his son come to him. The son speaks his repentant words but the father cut his speech short and calls for a feast in his son's honor. What?! Why?! Because this son who was **dead** is **alive** again.....if you want the abundant eternal life Jesus promises, you have to live it in relationship with Him and not in a 'far country.'

III. Conclusion

"... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."