

Look To Jesus, For Eternal Life

Sermon Theme: Eternal life is where Jesus will be, has been, is now, and is *with you*—wherever you may be.

Text: John 17:1–11

Other Lessons: Acts 1:12–26; Psalm 68:1–10; 1 Peter 4:12–19; 5:6–11

Goal: That the hearers believe more firmly that wherever Jesus is, there is eternal life, including their own daily lives.

Sermon Outline

1. Clue 1: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus will be.
2. Clue 2: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus has been.
3. Clue 3: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus is now.
4. Clue 4: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus is with you.

Eternal Life Is Where Jesus Will Be, Has Been, Is Now, and Is *with You*—Wherever You May Be.

The Church will have celebrated the ascension earlier in the week. Next Sunday brings Pentecost. Easter season spotlights Christ's resurrection. The text, however, takes us back before all these moments of exaltation have occurred. Jesus anticipates his Passion when he offers up this prayer. Time-wise, the text seems misplaced.

Today, to glorify someone is to hold that person up for praise and honor, and Jesus certainly holds the Father up for such praise. For John, though, the word has a more basic meaning of revealing or showing God's character and nature. Glorifying and making known go hand-in-hand. So the cross is the central act of glorification. It's not Jesus on a pedestal and people cheering, but on a cross and a crowd jeering that reveals God's essential character of mercy and love (Jn 12:28). Of course, Jesus doesn't stay dead, and each moment afterward continues the revelation. The resurrection is the Father's giving of life eternal. The Ascension shows the ongoing glorification of the Father as Jesus has authority over all creation. The glorification can't be contained, and Pentecost floods the world of this life-giving knowledge of God. At the end of the Easter season, this whole salvation journey is wrapped up in the Father and Son glorifying each other.

The High Priestly Prayer can be broken into three major sections: Jesus prays for himself (vv 1–5), for his disciples (vv 6–19), and for all believers (vv 20–26). My sermon zeroed in on the definition of eternal life given in v 3, prompted by John's stated goal of the whole Gospel in 20:31: these things have been written (and here prayed for) that the readers may believe and by believing may have life.

Eternal life is defined as knowledge of the Father and Jesus. Such knowledge is not merely correct understanding about God, but even more an intimate closeness with the Father through Jesus. Perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on the time aspect, that it is endless, everlasting. Rather, John focuses on the life bestowed by the Father through faith in his Son. **Eternal life is the restored relationship with God.** It is present now even though we know him only in part. This deep and personal knowing of God shapes life now and will be fully present in the age to come.

Sermon

When my children were younger, we made a treasure hunt for their Easter baskets. They would each get a clue, and then they would have to figure out where the next clue would be. They would run from attic to basement to outside to the kitchen following the clues until they arrived at the locations of their Easter baskets, which were usually in the dryer or closet or behind a chair. But the kids all had great fun following the clues to the treasure. Today, we're going to follow some clues to answer the question, "Where's eternal life?"

1.

Clue 1: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus will be.

When we think of eternal life, we think of a place called heaven, where Jesus will be when we die or he comes back on the Last Day. When we arrive, life there will be endless. It will be everlasting. We will be with Jesus, and how glorious that will be! Until he returns on the Last Day, we will be at rest, blissful in his presence. But when that day of resurrection comes and Jesus brings our bodies out of the grave, then we will know eternal life in all its fullness.

With our new eyes, we will see incredible colors and beauty. All creation will be remade with stars visible in all their multitudes. Lakes will be crystal clear and mountains will be majestic. Animals will live in harmony. What wonders we will see in eternal life!

And we will hear the most incredible music. Praises and honor sung to Jesus and his Father on the throne. Choirs of angels and resurrected believers will lift our spirits to heights never before experienced. Think of that one song that moves you to joyful tears and imagine that being sung for all eternity.

And we will have fingers and hands to hold one another once again. *I was reminded of my counseling, training that widows and widowers miss the touch of a spouse. It is lonely, but that loneliness is intensified because the everyday touches of a hug, hands being held, a kiss, a gentle caress are missing. Without human touch, we wither. What are we depriving ourselves of in this pandemic? Our grief reaches deeper into our spirits because these moments of loving touch disappear.*

But in the eternal life of resurrected glory, we will hug and touch those we loved and who also believed in this life.

Yes, eternal life is where Jesus will be. With sights, sounds, and touches, we will live endlessly in everlasting joy with Jesus.

2.

Clue 2: But we have another clue. Where's eternal life? Where Jesus has been!

Jesus prayed that he would be glorified and he would glorify the Father. Now when we hear the word *glorify*, we think of someone who's won a championship or gold medal. The person stands on a pedestal and receives the glory and adoration of those cheering. But the apostle John had something more basic in mind. He used *glorify* as simply revealing someone to other people. It shows who someone is. Jesus is praying that he will reveal the heavenly Father to us.

One time, Jesus was with his disciples and told them that he is the way and the truth and the life, that no one comes to the Father except through him. One of his disciples, Philip, said, "Show us the Father, and it is enough." Jesus responded, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:8-9). Jesus glorifies the Father by showing who the Father is and what he thinks of us. What we see when we look at Jesus is that our God is a God of love and life.

Watch what Jesus does one day. A man is in such a pitiful state. He's been kicked out of the village where he once resided. He lives destitute and dependent on others to give him food. His clothes are tattered and dirty. No one comes close to him. If anyone does, he yells out "Leper!" and everyone avoids him. No one has touched him for months. He is so lonely. The pain goes deeper than the sores on his skin.

But Jesus comes by and stops. He goes up to the man and (*pause*) touches him. Yes, Jesus heals him with a word. The sores are gone. But the simple touch is one of love. The man is given his life back. See God glorified as this act of love brings joyous praise to the man's lips. He is given life and life eternal in that touch.

Or listen to the sounds of agony coming from the three crosses at Calvary. Two criminals on either side of Jesus. The stench of death hovers in the air. Blood and sweat run into Jesus' mouth as he tastes the suffering required for the death in this world. One of the criminals asks for a blessing, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Now listen closely to Jesus glorify his Father. "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:42-43). A criminal who deserves to die is given life, eternal life, from Jesus.

Jesus glorified his Father. Not on a pedestal and with cheers but on a cross with jeering going on all around him. Yet, the sights and sounds of that day declare the glory of God as we see and hear God's love giving eternal life. Perhaps the most well-known Bible verse declares it well: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have (*and here you could stop and let the people fill in the last two words*) eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Yes, where's eternal life? Where Jesus has been.

3.

Clue 3: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus is now.

Jesus did not stay dead. He rose from the grave and is here now with us, bringing eternal life.

You see, eternal life needs to begin, and it doesn't start after we die. No, eternal life begins as soon as Jesus gives us life lived in the love and mercy of the Father. A child is brought to be baptized. "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." See it. Hear it. Touch it. Eternal life has begun in that child's life as Jesus scoops him/her up as his own child. When you live by faith in Jesus, forgiven and loved by the Father, you are living eternal life right then and there.

Or when you come up for the Lord's Supper. Jesus is truly present in the bread and wine. Touch it. Taste it. Then you get up to leave and hear these words, "This true body and blood of Jesus strengthen and preserve you in true faith until life everlasting." Right here, at this altar, you receive eternal life because Jesus is here.

The same is true for the words we hear from the Bible. *⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.. Where Jesus is in Word and Sacraments, there is eternal life.*

4.

Clue 4: Where's eternal life? Where Jesus is with you.

Eternal life is not so much a place in the future. Eternal life is not just what happened in the past. Eternal life is not just here in the church. Do you see where each clue led you? Eternal life is where Jesus is. He will be there in glory forever, and so is eternal life. He was there on the cross revealing the Father's love, and so is eternal life. He is here in this worship time, and so is eternal life. But he is also wherever you go, and when you are with Jesus, you are living eternal life. Leave here and you can see it, hear it, touch it.

At the gas station when someone comes up to you, saying, "My car is on empty, and I don't have any money for gas." It looks like Jesus leading you to use your credit card to put gas in the tank. It sounds like a pleasant conversation as the gas is pumped. It's the touch of a handshake as you speak a word of blessing.

At the restaurant when the server brings you your food. It looks like a prayer, but even more. Eternal life is Jesus leading you to speak kindly to the server, to clean up the table so the busser has an easier job, and a more than generous tip for all the staff that saw you pray, holding hands with one another.

A real-life application involving touch. After my mother died somewhat suddenly, we went to the funeral home to arrange for the services. We answered all sorts of questions about when the funeral would be, what songs were to be played, flowers, obituary notice, where she would be buried, and more. Because she had requested not to be buried in a casket, the funeral director said we could use a liner. She was practical to the end. Then he left us alone for a few minutes. The moment brought tears and the one thing that was so needed—a hug. I put my arms around Jean and held her tight. The human touch in a moment of grief, and Jesus is there—that's eternal life (Jn 17:3).

Where is eternal life? Where Jesus will be. Where Jesus has been. Where Jesus is right now. Where Jesus is with you every day.

Eternal Life Is Where Jesus Will Be, Has Been,
Is Now, and Is *with You*—Wherever You May Be.

Now, what a treasure eternal life is because it's simply life with the Father through his Son, Jesus. Amen.