

John 83 – This is Eternal Life**04/05/2026****Scripture 1: (Jn. 17:1-5 ESV)**

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Sermon:

Chapter 17 of John's Gospel is often called Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" because it is His longest recorded prayer and because it is an exemplary intercessory prayer. It is a beautiful example of Jesus praying to our heavenly Father. Across this prayer, Jesus prays for Himself, prays for His disciples, and He even prays for us today. Through this prayer, Jesus acted as our High Priest. He was performing one of their two principle duties: intercession; and He did it within the context of preparing a sin-offering (Leviticus 4:29-31) for sacrifice (while preparing Himself to be the sufficient sacrifice for our sin) (Hebrews 5, 9:11-15, 9:25-26). Doing so, He knew that soon, He would performing the other duty: offering a sacrifice for atonement.

This prayer has been very impactful in the lives of countless saints. It has been a great comfort and a source of encouragement for many believers. If you think back, it has also probably been a comfort to you. For example, knowing that he lay upon his deathbed, with his time to pass imminently closing, John Knox commanded his wife to "Go, read where I cast my first anchor..", asking her to read him this passage¹ because it was comforting to hear our Lord pray for him; confidently believing that, during that moment on the night before His arrest, Jesus held him personally and specifically in mind.

So, as we read through Chapter 17, we can tell by the manner that the evangelist presents this moment within the passion narrative, he wants us to fully and rightly understand what Jesus was doing. John is trying to help us understand the mindset of Jesus in this moment; understanding that Jesus knew precisely what He was doing, knowing how the upcoming events would each occur, and thus was preparing Himself and His disciples for the coming ordeal.

But, since so many things have already occurred during this one evening, and have been described throughout the preceding three chapters, we should pause a moment and quickly review them. During this Passover evening, Jesus has already:

- washed the disciples' feet (13:3-12).
- warned them of Judas' impending betrayal (13:21-30).
- commanded them to "...love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." (Jn. 13:34 ESV).
- warned Peter of his imminent, triple denial (13:36-38).
- declared, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (Jn. 14:6 ESV).
- told them that He will ask the Father to send them "*another paraklete*": "*another Helper*", the Holy Spirit to sanctify them, to teach them, to dwell within them along side the Father and the Son (14:16-31).
- declared, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*" (Jn. 15:1-7 ESV); thus describing the necessity of a Christian's union into Him.

¹<https://thisday.pcahistory.org/2020/11/november-24-death-of-john-knox/>

- called His disciples, His friends (15:14).
- warned them to expect experiencing the world's hatred, because it has hated Him first (15:8-16:4).
- explained more about what the Holy Spirit shall do when He comes from the Father (16:7-15).
- comforted them by telling that that while they shall be sorrowful and grieve for Him, their sadness will become joy soon afterward (16:16-14).
- Lastly, Jesus has declared, "*In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" (Jn. 16:33 ESV); thereby proclaiming His ultimate triumph, which was soon to be fully realized in time.

Then, after all of this, "*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and...*" He began to pray. Jesus first prayed, "*Father, the hour has come...*". Throughout John's Gospel, there have been repeated references to a particular hour, to a specific moment in time. Through his usage, we know that "this hour" did not refer to some certain 60 minutes of time, but was a metaphor to describe an anticipated moment or unique occasion. We recall that:

- at Cana, it was not Jesus' hour (2:4);
- during the Feast of Booths, it was not Jesus' hour (7:30); and,
- when Jesus taught in the Temple, after the Feast, it still was not Jesus' hour (8:20).
- But, after Jesus was received triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when even the Gentiles began to show interest in Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus declared, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" (Jn. 12:23 ESV).
- So, now we know that "the hour" for Jesus' glorification was surely here; an hour which we understand stretches from the Triumphal Entry, through the crucifixion, then beyond and through His Ascension into the present and eternal future!

Then next, Jesus prayed that the Father would, "*...glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...*". Jesus prayed for something that probably feels slightly uncomfortable and awkward for us; praying for glory. He prayed for something which, if we were praying for it, could be considered self-righteous, selfish, and full of hubris. But, when Jesus asked God for glory, He was asking for it with specific purpose and good intention; asking for glory so that He could better glorify His Father in heaven; to better worship God by working for the Father's glory rather than His own. Jesus asked for this glory so that He could do the work that He had been given to do by the Father more effectively; to rightly do the work He had come down from Heaven to Earth to do. He asked for this glory because the Father had "*...given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom [the Father had] given him.*"; so that He could and would give life to all of God's Elect people, whether they are ethnic Jews, or Gentiles, or our forebears in the faith, or believers yet to be born.

But, we should note Jesus' specificity in this request. Jesus had been given authority "*over all flesh*". He had been given the absolute authority to perform one specific and singular task: "*...to give eternal life to all whom [the Father had] given Him.*". At this moment in time, Jesus had not yet been given "*all authority*"; meaning that, while Jesus is God the Son and He truly always possesses "*all authority in heaven and earth*" (Matthew 28:18) as the Sovereign LORD, He did not have the present "permission" of the Father to exert that authority. It was not a part of the divine will that Jesus should exert the fullness of His rightful authority, at that time, but instead to willingly submit Himself to lawful authority, and suffer the abuse of that authority at the hands of sinful men: namely the Jews and their High Priest, as well as the Romans and their Governor. Yet, even during

His submission, Jesus possessed the lawful authority “...to give eternal life...” because it would be through His willing submission to their authority that He would give it and so glorify His Father in heaven.

Then, Jesus continued to pray, “*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.*”. Yes, the work of Jesus' earthly ministry glorified the Father: all His teaching and all of His miracles and wonders glorified the Father; but, at that moment in time, all Jesus' earthly work was not yet completed, even though its completion was certain by divine decree and ordination, and in the divine perspective from outside of time. But within time, Jesus still had the Crucifixion crucible ahead of Him. Regardless, Jesus had done the works that had been given to Him by the Father and, He would continue to do the Father's work (John 5:16-23).

But, which work did Jesus mean when He said that it had been accomplished? What was that work, really? Was it whole His ministry? How great was His ministry, actually? Had Jesus done everything that He could have done?

- Although Jesus could have healed every person around Him, even everyone in the whole world, by merely uttering a word of command (as He healed the Capernaum official's son in John 4:46-54); He did not.
- Although Jesus could have raised all of the deceased; widows could have received their husbands back, orphans could have had their parents returned, and grieving parents could have had their children restored (as He raised Lazarus in John 11); He did not.
- Although Jesus could have calmed every storm and walked across every sea (as He did in John 6:16-21) and, He could have provided enough food (as He did in John 6:1-13) and refreshment (as He did in John 2:1-10) for everyone who hungered and thirsted; He did not.

However, performing those works: as great, good, and wondrous as they were; were not the primary work that Jesus was sent into the world to accomplish. They were not the work given Him, by the Father, that Jesus had fully accomplished at this moment. The specific work which was Jesus referring to in this prayer, was His work of living a perfectly righteous life; living in perfect obedience to the Father and God's perfect Law.

- At that moment of time, Jesus had fully satisfied the righteous requirement that Adam failed to meet.
- Jesus had perfectly passed the probationary test which Adam failed (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:19-22).
- Jesus, in that moment, was the perfect example of human perfection: sinless and without blemish (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus, in that moment, was declaring Himself to be the perfect Passover lamb, given by God the Father for the redemption of Elect humanity (Exodus 12:5) so that they would be passed over by His just wrath (Exodus 12); given as “...*the propitiation for our sins.*” (1 Jn. 4:10 ESV).
 - Once again, Merry Christmas!

This work is an important part of our Christian faith that we often ignore or forget. This is the part which actually gets us across the spiritual finish line. We generally focus upon the atoning work of Jesus' death on the cross, believing and trust that that is what gets us into heaven. But really, it is only half of the story.

- Dying on the cross, Jesus took our deserved condemnation for sin upon Himself; dying to sin for us (Romans 6:10) and therefore, putting the power of our sin to death (killing our sin).
- Dying on the cross, Jesus atoned for our sin as a willing substitute (Leviticus 16): the righteous for the unrighteous (1 Peter 3:18); paying and suffering our deserved penalty. But it is not His death that justifies us before the Father's judgment throne.

- Dying on the cross, Jesus did not make us righteous in the sight of God, but rather He made us to no longer be unrighteous in God's sight. Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself: imputed them to Himself and credited responsibility for them to His account, without being personally guilty of them. He took all of our moral debt away.
- Dying on the cross, Jesus then wiped out our debt of sin: CANCELED it; marked it, PAID IN FULL; and therefore, He made us “morally neutral”; making us be neither unrighteous nor righteous.

If all we focus our faith upon, if all that we are trusting in, is Jesus' death on the cross and merely believing that Jesus earned us forgiveness for our sin, through this gracious work, then we remain lost. If all we are trusting Jesus for is His work on the cross: that He has only restored us to this moral neutrality; then we are still trusting in ourselves for our salvation. We are still trusting that our good works will make us righteous, since Jesus has wiped out all of our moral badness. That's just another kind of Pelagianism (semi-Pelagianism), believing that Jesus's grace simply makes up for whatever moral difference remained to get us into heaven; assuming that we only just needed a “little help” from our friend, Jesus, since we did all the rest ourselves.

This is where the God-glorifying work which Jesus had already accomplished, at that moment of time, matters for us. The God-glorifying work that Jesus accomplished was His righteous life: His earned righteousness; His sinlessness; Him having never succumbed to Satan's temptations; Him never transgressing any of the LORD's negative commandments and His fulfillment of their positive opposite. The God-glorifying work that Jesus had accomplished at this point in His life's narrative is the righteousness that He imputed to us, when He took our sin upon Himself (Isaiah 61:10): His righteousness. This work was the “*robe of righteousness*” that He has clothed us in, as our “*garment of salvation*”. This righteousness is what brings our “moral account” into the positive. While Jesus' death on the cross brought our account out of the Red, it was Jesus's perfectly righteous life that brings us up into the Black!

When we lose sight of this fact: of the need for Jesus's lived righteousness; we run the risk of reducing the story of Jesus's life, as presented in the Gospels (especially as described in the Synoptics), to merely be a moralistic example. Then, every time that Jesus showed His love for neighbor: every act of healing, every feeding, and every act of compassion; simply is reduced to an example for us to follow. Some might consider it a perfect or ideal example but, if they are only examples, then they each become a should, not a must.

- If we reduce Jesus's life to merely being a succession of moral examples, then we also rob His death on the cross of power. Then, the cross merely becomes an example of self-sacrifice.
- If the cross was just an example of self-sacrifice, then there is no atonement since Jesus would not have died to pay for our sin, but as an example for us to emulate.
- If Jesus did not die on the cross as penal satisfaction for sin's offense, then His death on the cross would have been functionally unnecessary and a horrific act of “cosmic child abuse”.
- If Jesus did not actually die to pay for our sin, then God's mercy in forgiveness is reduced to a divine “hand wave” as He simply “winks” at sin (rather than punishing it). Then, the resurrection is similarly reduced to just being an example of what a “good person” might hope for, rather than being the sign of God's promises being fulfilled.

But those are all lies. Those belong to the **false gospels** of Liberal Christianity and Progressivism. Those belong to a faithless and dead religion. Both Jesus' death and His perfectly righteous life matter for our salvation. Unless we have both, we have neither. So, at that moment, in the midst of His prayer, Jesus had already accomplished the work of earning righteousness for us, glorifying God the Father while doing so and then, all that remained for Him to do before He gave “*eternal life*” to the Elect, was for Him to go to the cross and make satisfaction for our sin; offering Himself as our perfect sacrificial substitute.

Lastly, Jesus prayed, “*Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*”. He asked to be restored to being in the Father's presence. He asked to be restored from His *kenosis*: from His “emptying” of Himself, as described by Paul in Philippians 2:5-11; to be restored from the humiliation of His Incarnation (WSC #27) and to again be exalted by the Father (WSC #28).

Looking ahead, we know that this prayer will be answered and how. Surely while Jesus was praying it, He also knew that it would be answered, including the how and when. Yet, even having this foreknowledge did not prevent, hinder, or limit His prayer. Jesus prayed with certainty and with confidence, believing in and trusting that the Father would answer Him, because He knew that it was within the Father's will. This example of Jesus praying should fill each of us with similar confidence when we earnestly pray “in Jesus' Name”; praying in, and praying for God's will to be done. Nevertheless, Jesus asked for and knew that He would be restored to the glory He had possessed in the beginning for truly, He never lost it and He never left the Father's presence, although the glory of God and the fact of His presence were both obscured and hidden by the Incarnation.

So, within Jesus' prayer for Himself:

- Jesus asked the LORD for glory so that He could glorify the LORD;
- Jesus announced the authority which He already possessed; the authority and charge to give “eternal life” to God's chosen, Elect people for the purpose of glorifying the LORD;
- Jesus asserted the fact that He has already glorified the Father by accomplishing the work He had been given, by Him living a perfectly righteous and sinless life; and,
- Jesus asked the LORD to restore Him to the fullness of His presence and the glory that He had with the Father before creation.

But, there is a critically important question in this passage that we have not yet addressed. What is eternal life? As Christians, we really ought to know what eternal life **is** since we hope for it, and since we talk about it so very much among ourselves, and because we often use that expression as a “carrot”, holding it out for non-believers when we try to have an evangelistic conversation.

So, what is eternal life?

- Is it merely the unending continuation of our present existence....although, in some spiritual sphere rather than a physical one? No.
- Is it a new, spiritual life lived in heaven, that we get to enjoy after we die? A lived existence comprised of clouds, of wings, or of golden harps and trumpets? No.
- Will it be a physical existence where each of us possess our ideal 33 year old form (since that was Jesus' age when He was crucified²), and one where we shall all speak and read ancient Hebrew (since that is the “divine language³”)? I am confident that that is also a highly probable, “No”.

But, there are many people who do believe such things. Fortunately, we do not need to speculate or create such fantasies since Scripture, when it is considered in totality, provides us with certain impressions and expectations.

- From the LORD's original offer of eternal life to Adam, through his original access to the “tree of life” (Genesis 2:9) and its later prohibition (Genesis 3:22-24), we know that there must be a physical element to eternal life (**Greek: *bios***).

²<https://www.epm.org/resources/2020/Aug/7/age-appear-heaven/>

³<https://www.yaiy.org/literature/HebrewOriginalLang.html>

- Since the LORD originally made Adam by forming him from the dust of the ground and then, He “...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...” (Gen. 2:7 ESV) (the *neshamat chayim*) and later used the flood to “...destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven.” (Gen. 6:17 ESV) (the *ruach chayim*), we know that there also must be a companion spiritual life (**Greek: *zoe***) for our physical life; a spiritual component that can be broken and killed (Job 10:12; Psalm 51:17; Proverbs 15:4), for we know that “...the wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23 ESV).
- The Old Testament implies the idea that our physical life continues, even when that spirit is dead, since the LORD promised to eventually “...revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isa. 57:15 ESV). This led to Jesus's assertion to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.’” (Jn. 3:5-7 ESV), teaching that true life (eternal life; John 3:14-17) requires the “living presence” of both (*bios* and *zoe*).
- Both the Apostles Paul and Peter taught that believers are made to be “*alive in Christ*” (Romans 6:11; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:5; 1 Peter 3:18), referring plainly to our spiritual life: to our regeneration by the Holy Spirit; to our having been “born again” (**Greek: *anathen***); to a *zoe* that does not end even when our *bios* ends.
- Meanwhile, Paul taught about and described the future resurrection of our *bios* and its reunification with our *zoe*, “*So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*” (1 Cor. 15:42-53 ESV)

Therefore, we must conclude, from this Biblical Theology, that “eternal life” is something both physical **and** spiritual. But, this unified physical and spiritual state of being is also not itself “eternal life”, even though it is an expressed consequence of it. Jesus, here in this “High Priestly Prayer”, told His disciples (and tells us) what “eternal life” truly is, using plain speech. Jesus said, “*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*”. So, eternal life is the “knowledge of God”. But, it is not merely “knowledge about God”: such as being able to describe His attributes or explain His covenant promises; it is consequential knowledge. Eternal life is the relational knowledge of God (Greek: *ginosko*): to know and be known by; to understand and be understood by; and, to be in covenant with.

Eternal life is not simply a matter of knowing that the LORD is God, and that there is no other (Isaiah 45:18); knowing that Jesus is the Christ, God the Son, the Son of God, and the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; because “*Even the demons believe-- and shudder!*” (Jas. 2:19 ESV). No, the kind of knowledge that Jesus was speaking of here is so intimate and so close, that it can only be had and may only be known if a person is united into and identified with Jesus Christ. This kind of knowledge can only be had by someone who has been grafted into the “*true vine*” of Christ (John 15:1; Romans 11:17-24); something that can only be initiated by the divine

“*Vinedresser*”, God the Father; and something that can only be produced through the Holy Spirit's regeneration and His life supporting, tender, and merciful care. Meanwhile, the effect of having this consequential knowledge, is that such a person receives the full benefit of the Covenant of Grace: redemption from their bondage to Satan; forgiveness (and satisfaction) for their moral debt of sin through Jesus' death on the cross; justification as being righteous before God the Father, clothed by Christ's righteousness; and adoption as God's beloved child and made to become an heir of heaven with Jesus Christ, our elder Brother.

Again, this is why remembering Jesus's work of living a perfectly righteous life is so important for us, as Christians united into Him. It is because through “knowing” God and, by being united into Jesus Christ, we now possess Jesus' morally righteous life: His perfect obedience is credited to us. Having this righteousness grants us the right to also possess the eternal life that was first promised to Adam in the Covenant of Works: promising Adam eternal life for his perfect obedience (Genesis 2:16-17); as, “...*Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law...*” the righteousness that Jesus Himself earned as a work accomplished, “...*that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.*” (Rom. 10:5 ESV).

So together, through the accomplished works of His life and death on the cross, Jesus earned both our forgiveness for sin (through the atoning satisfaction of His death) and our right to life eternal, under the Law, (through the righteousness of His life). Being grafted into the vine of Christ, just as our sin became His and His righteousness became ours, so too our deserved death became His and His deserved life became ours. Which brings us to the resurrection; to the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we are celebrating today (which we celebrate every Sunday, honestly).

Jesus' resurrection was the final miracle and the final proof of both Who Jesus is: the LORD, God Almighty; and of What Jesus has done for us (redeemed us from our sin and earned us a place in heaven with Him).

- Dying, Jesus cried out “*Tetelestai*”!, “*It is finished...*” (Jn. 19:30 ESV), or “The debt is paid!”.
- By rising from the dead, God the Father affirmed God the Son's righteousness by restoring to life and glorifying the only man without sin; affirming Him as the only man who did not deserve to die; affirming Him as the only man who truly deserved to live.
- By rising from the dead, God the Father confirmed the truth about everything that Jesus had ever said, proving Him to not only be filled with the truth, but to be Truth, Himself.
- By rising from the dead, God the Father confirmed Jesus as God the Son: the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; by restoring to Jesus the glory that He had before the very beginning, when He was simply “*the Word*”, when He was simply “*with God*”, and simply when He “*was God*”.
- By rising from the dead, God the Father confirmed Jesus is God, eternally.

God is not Dead. He is alive! He is risen! He is risen, indeed.

Believe this and know God, and Jesus Christ. Know them, believe them, and be saved.

Hallelujah! AMEN