

## We Believe Part 20

We have reached the last phrase of the Apostles' Creed. Let's take a look this morning as we recite the Creed. I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

In the last message we shared before Holy Week we talked about the resurrection of the body. We made the point that we are not just talking about the immortality of the soul, but that the righteous will live on in God's presence in a body like Jesus' glorified body. Body, soul and spirit reunited and crowned with God's glory. Our belief in the life everlasting goes hand in hand with the resurrection of the body. But what exactly does everlasting life mean?

It sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? If we asked most people what everlasting or eternal life means, most would say it means life without end. Life that goes on and on and on forever. And they would be correct in thinking that. As we've taught over these past few weeks, we believe in the resurrection of body, that all will be raised to stand before God. The wicked are raised to an eternity apart from God in hell while those who have placed their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord will spend eternity in heaven with the Lord. Everlasting life is the destiny of all the saints of God in the sense that we will rise to never die again. We will live on forever and forever, but that's not all it means. In fact, that is probably not the primary meaning.

In the bible we find the words everlasting and eternal used repeatedly and interchangeably. They both translate the same Greek word *aionios*. I'm not a Greek scholar and I try not to act like one, but allow me to make this point. Look at this translation of a familiar verse of Scripture: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have *aionios zoe*." John 3:16 Everlasting or eternal life.

Now, let me show you another verse and another word. In Galatians Paul says, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to

rescue us from the present evil age.” Galatians 1:3-4. That last line can be translated as “the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil aion.” Do you see that Greek word? Aionios and aion give us the idea of perpetual, forever time, but also of the idea of an age or literally, “pertaining to an age.” The idea is that we aren’t just talking about quantity of years, we are talking about a quality of life in a brand new age, a new world, a new dimension and existence.

Paul tells us that Jesus gave himself to rescue us from this present evil age. We could even say to rescue us from this present evil world. I don’t have to try to convince you that this world, this age we live in is evil and broken and it just keeps getting worse. By contrast there is another age, another world that awaits all who have made Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord and have turned from sin and are living for him. One writer said that Everlasting life is “a life consistent with the age to come.” (Westcott). We believe that through our faith in Christ and his saving grace we receive eternal life, i.e. we are made to be partakers of a life with God that is limitless, that is as it was meant to be without the debilitating, crippling, limiting effects and consequences of sin! Think about it! Everlasting life as God intended it to be. Part of an age and a world made by God, prepared for us by Jesus, where not even the slightest hint of sin or its consequences exist. Every tear has been wiped from our eyes. There is not even a reminder of death – no decay, no demise, no sorrow, no grief, no sickness, no pain, no despair. We believe in the life everlasting, not just an existence like this that goes on and on in time, but a whole new world, a new age, a new life fully realized in Christ! That’s what we are talking about, but let’s explore this a little further.

Jesus came preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand. He was announcing the existence and the arrival of another kingdom, another world or “age” different from this temporal sinful world. Remember when Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews, Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world...my kingdom is from another place.” John 18:36 That kingdom, God’s kingdom was breaking in upon this present age through the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Through our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord, we become citizens of that heavenly kingdom. The bible says “[God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13 We are in Christ and that means we are new creations in him, made

to share in the life of God and become partakers of his divine nature. We are already, by faith, citizens of the eternal kingdom of God. The bible in the book of Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us God has set eternity in our hearts. Through faith in Christ, through the victory of his death and resurrection, He imparts to us eternal life. The writer of Hebrews says we have "...tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age..." Hebrews 6:5 We get a taste now of the everlasting life that will be ours in the coming age, in the fullness of his kingdom.

Michael Horton wrote that through the cross and the resurrection "We are already enjoying, in an embryonic state, the realities of the coming age." ...Michael Horton

The great songwriter Fanny Crosby wrote, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine." ...Fanny Crosby

That's the everlasting life we are talking about. Eternal life is not just time without end but life without limits, living forever in the full experience and expression of God's kingdom and glory. You don't want to miss this, so let's make sure you know how to experience this eternal life.

In Mark 10:17 we read the story of a man we call the rich young ruler. He ran to Jesus, fell on his knees before him and asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's a wise question to ask. Jesus spoke to him about how he was living out his faith. "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" The man answered, "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy." The bible says, "Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'" The bible tells us the young man went away sad because he had great wealth. This prompts a discussion with the disciples. Jesus said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples, perhaps thinking that the rich have been blessed of God and surely will be able to get into heaven then ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

I've highlighted four things from this passage as you can see. Notice the first three things: The young man wanted to know how to inherit eternal life. Jesus talked about entering

the kingdom of God and the disciples talked about being saved. Three different things and yet when you look at it, they are basically talking about the same thing. I make this point again: inheriting eternal life is the same as entering the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is where God rules and reigns, where his throne and his authority and dominion are established. The age that is to come will be characterized by God's undisputed rule and reign over everything. ("Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus was praying that God's rulership and authority would be established here just as it is in heaven.) To inherit eternal life is to come into a relationship with God where his rulership, his authority, his reign is established in your life. Did you hear that? To inherit eternal life is to come into a relationship with God where his rulership and authority is established in your life. It isn't just saying words, it is living a life surrendered to the Lordship of Christ!

The disciples asked, "who then can be saved?" We probably don't use that phrase as much as we used to. We say someone "committed their life to Christ" or "received Christ as Savior", but we don't often say "they got saved." It's a pretty good word when you stop to realize that without Christ we are perishing. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. We are perishing and we need someone to rescue us, to save us because we can't save ourselves! Understand, we aren't just needing a fresh start to life, a reboot, we are drowning in our own sinfulness, in our own mistakes and stupidity. We are perishing.

It looks like, according to Jesus in John 3:16, there are two options. There is eternal life through believing in Christ and there is perishing. You don't have to perish because Jesus came to rescue you from the kingdom of death and bring you into the kingdom of life. Believe in him and he will save you, rescue you and give you eternal life. Refuse to believe in him and receive his life and you will perish. Those are your only options.

In his prayer in John 17 Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." John 17:3. Who can be saved and have eternal life? Those who believe upon the son (John 3:16) and those who know God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). What does it mean to know God and Jesus Christ? Know them as God, as Father, as Savior, as Lord, as Redeemer, as Master. Know God in a personal way through Jesus

Christ. Know the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Know God as you obey His word and live for him. Know Him and you have eternal life!

Stuart Briscoe, in his book on the Apostles' Creed writes, "When you know God, you're not alienated from him; you're not perishing. When you know God, he establishes his kingdom in your life and Christ is your Lord. When Christ is your Lord, you begin to experience his life, which is the life of the age to come. So you begin to discover while you are still alive that you're in touch with God, with eternity, with goodness and righteousness and truth in the here and now. You're beginning to enjoy the sweet by and by. When I say, 'I believe in life everlasting,' that's what I am talking about. It is a mind-blowing concept."...Stuart Briscoe

Notice the disciples asked their question about who can be saved in response to something strange that Jesus said. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Mark 10:25 Someone told me once it was possible to get a camel through the eye of a needle, but first you have to grind him up real fine. Jesus is saying you've got as much of a chance at getting into heaven by your own efforts as you have in shoving a camel through the eye of a needle. You've got as much of a chance of earning eternal life or doing something to deserve everlasting life as you've got in pushing a grown camel through the eye of a needle. In other words, it's impossible. But then when the disciples asked, "who then can be saved?" Jesus answered, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Inheriting eternal life through our efforts is impossible. We can't experience that everlasting life of the kingdom of God by working extra hard or by good works. Salvation, eternal life, the kingdom of God, those things come as a result of God's grace being extended to us in Christ Jesus.

Look back at the rich young ruler in Mark 10. When he approached Jesus he called him "Good teacher" and Jesus said, "Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone." Mark 10:18 We know that Jesus was good, that he never sinned, but why do you suppose he said this to this young man? Perhaps it was because he knew this young ruler already felt he was good enough. Jesus, the "good teacher" wanted to let this guy know that being good wasn't the way to inherit eternal life because no one is good enough, except God alone.

Jesus didn't tell him to go keep the commandments, although he could have, but even keeping the commandments won't be enough. He told him to sell everything he had and give to the poor. But even if he had done that, giving to the poor wouldn't bring him, or us, eternal life. It would have removed one of the idols in this young man's life no doubt, but the key to eternal life is found in the last four words Jesus said to the man. "Then come, follow me." Mark 10:21

Here is the key. Eternal life comes not from the good works we do but from knowing God through Christ and following him, believing in him, serving him, living for him, obeying him. Jesus is saying if you want eternal life turn away from your sin and come follow me!

How can we have everlasting life? How can we keep from perishing? How can we even truly follow him? With man it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible. We have to understand, this eternal, everlasting life is a gift from God. The bible says "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves – it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8-9.

Salvation is the gift of God. When someone gives you a gift you don't say, "Wow, what do I owe you?" You don't pay for a gift because someone else has already paid for it. Jesus paid the price in order to give us the gift of salvation and eternal life. The bible says, "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:4-7

Salvation and eternal life is a gift given to us by God, not based on our works, but based upon his mercy. The bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

We believe in life everlasting. We believe that to be the life we will experience in the age to come but we also believe we taste of that eternal life now. We live now as citizens of the kingdom of God and we submit now to his rulership and authority in our lives. Are you living like a citizen of the heavenly king? Are you living in obedience to him, in submission to him and his word? You see, this is how we know we have this gift of eternal life.

Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria he would give her living water that would become in her “a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The word translated as welling up is the same Greek word used in describing the man at the beautiful gate that was healed and began walking and leaping and praising God. This gift of eternal life will produce spiritual life and vitality in you. The life of God will leap up and well up in your life if you will believe upon Jesus Christ, repent of your sins and turn to him in faith. Ask him to forgive you and to become the Savior and Lord of your life. He will give you this gift of eternal life if you will surrender your life to him!

Remember John 3:16. God wants to give you eternal life, here and now and there and forever. The alternative remember is perishing. The story is told that Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century preacher told his congregation to go home, take a piece of paper and write one word on it, either “forgiven” or “condemned.” Perhaps I could ask you to write either “everlasting life” or “perishing.” Which would you write? Which describes you, your spiritual condition, your eternal destiny? Everlasting life or perishing. The decision is in your hands.