

***“This Is Eternal Life”***

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John 17:1-11

It's Jesus' last chance to impart the essence of what he desires for and from his disciples, so, at that last supper, Jesus gives his *farewell message*. *Don't you imagine that if the disciples only knew that this would be the last time they would hear Jesus teach they would have hung on every word?* While his disciples didn't know this was his farewell message we know and we can learn so much of the heart of Jesus as we study chapters 13 through 16 of the gospel of John.

Jesus begins his teaching by demonstrating how followers are to treat one another. Jesus takes up the towel and wash basin and washes his disciples' feet and then exhorts them to *“wash one another's feet.”* Jesus gives his disciples a *“new commandment, that you love one another”* just as he had loved them. He promises them that *“the one who believes in me will do greater works”* than he has done. Jesus promised that even though he would no longer be with them in bodily form he would not leave them *“orphaned”* but would send an *“Advocate....Helper....Friend.... Counselor.... Comforter”* to be with them *“forever.”* He promised that the *Advocate, the Holy Spirit* will teach them everything and would remind them of all he had taught. Jesus taught them that he is the *vine and we are the branches and those who abide in him will bear much fruit*. He also reminded his disciples that *“you did not choose me but I choose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit.”* He again makes the point that it is to their advantage that he go away because then he will, then, send the *Advocate* to them. After Jesus teaches his disciples in word and deed, he turns his attention toward God and prayed that most beautiful prayer we call the *“High Priestly Prayer of Jesus.”*

**Read John 17:1-11**

**17** After 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, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal

life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

<sup>6</sup>"I 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. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for 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. <sup>9</sup>I 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. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

<sup>11</sup>And 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.

Jesus' prayer begins with praise and thanksgiving for eternal life. *When you hear the words "eternal life" what comes to you mind?* Most might assume it has something to do with life on the other side of the grave....life for eternity. But what is eternal life? In Jesus' great prayer he prays, **<sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**

Eternal life is to know God through Christ. Eternal life is more about relationship than it is about a quantity of time after we die. Jesus did not pray that eternal life is to *know about* the one true God....he prayed that eternal life is to *know* the one true God. There is a vast difference between knowing about and knowing. One can study theology and the Bible as a mere exercise of intellectual curiosity. But eternal life begins when we begin to know the One about whom we are studying. Eternal life begins as we begin to see and experience God in the daily comings and goings of our life.

We do not have to wait until we die to begin to experience eternal life. Eternal life isn't something that starts in some other place or some other time. It begins now because eternal life is knowing God and experiencing God's presence in the here and now.

Jesus *taught* his disciples how to live with their eyes wide open to see and experience God's *Advocate*....the Holy Spirit. Next week we will celebrate the gift of God's Spirit given to all followers at Pentecost that we might be reminded of and empowered by God's life giving presence through God's Spirit. Jesus now *prays* for us that we might live with eyes wide open to see God at work in our lives. Jesus' great desire for us is that we would begin to live the new life....that eternal life....in this present moment.

***<sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.***

*In what ways has God begun to raise you from death to new life? That's eternal life!*

*In what ways have you grown in faith, hope and love? That's eternal life!*

*In what ways have you witnessed circumstances that can only be explained as God's had at work? That's eternal life!*

*In what ways have you experienced that holy nudge to reach out or to get out of the boat for the well being of others? That's God's gift of eternal life!*

Eternal life is knowing God through Jesus Christ and, because of that relationship, living with a heightened sense of God's active presence right where we live. *How have you experience God's presence lately?*

My Story of *Eternal Life* with **Stan Gessaman**.....

I had just returned to the office from having lunch with a friend and I got the word that Stan Gessaman was in Hospice care. That surprised me in that the last time I saw Stan, just a few days earlier, he was nicely settling into rehab at Bethany after a brief hospitalization. So, I hopped on my motorcycle and went directly to Hospice. There I found Stan's wife of 72 years **Alma**, his two sons, **Don** and **John**, and their wives, and two of his three grandchildren, **Kurt** and **Lea**. After offering prayer, I sat with Stan and his family and while Stan slept the family shared their stories of life with Stan.

There was laughter and tears as we shared fond memories and wonderful characteristics of Stan. Being 96 years old there were many stories that could have been told. But the family painted a beautiful picture of a loving, patient and gracious man. At one point I shared how I saw this time of sharing as a holy time and that Stan must be feeling especially blessed to have his family expressing their love and supporting one another. Alma agreed that it was, indeed, a holy time!

After about an hour I sensed that it was time to read scripture....I felt a holy nudge to express that desire but sense I hadn't brought my Bible, having come on my motorcycle (I always keep it in my car), I asked Kurt if he would look for a Bible. He found a Gideon Bible after looking in almost every drawer and cupboard in that room....we were beginning to wonder if a Bible would be found. At that point I exchanged places with Alma so that I could sit close to Stan and read into his ear. I placed my hand on his forehead and began reading Psalm 23. By the grace of God, Stan took his last breath while the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm was being read. All of us in that room knew we were standing in the presence of God and we had just witnessed eternal life. Not just because we believed Stan was being welcomed into heaven but because it was obvious that God had orchestrated the sharing, the love/affirmation given, the tears and laughter, and the search and reading of the Bible. We knew we were on holy ground and it would have been most appropriate for us to have taken off our shoes.

I am thankful for that experience as it, again, confirms that the *Advocate* is working out God's eternal life on this side of the grave. God is with us always and eternal is ours to experience every day!

Today we come to the Lord's Table. We often think of the Lord's Supper as a memorial meal....this do in "remembrance" of me. While, in this holy meal, we do remember Christ's love incredibly demonstrated through his death on the cross, we would do well to keep in mind that this meal is also a holy meal of eternal life....including eternal life this side of the grave. By faith we experience the real, living presence of Jesus Christ who is the host of this meal. By faith Jesus is actually and truly present just as he was present with his disciples at the Last Supper. By faith we grow deeper in our faith through this meal and, thus, it becomes an avenue of eternal life. Yes, eternal life is received on June 5, 2011 right here at the Table of our Lord!