

**INTRO:**<sup>1</sup>

Well I hope the last two Sundays of Church Sabbath proved restful for you. They certainly were for me and my family. We got to visit our extended family in NC. EVEN got to get some of the grandparents and cousins together for a flag football game that included - I kid you not - my 74-year-old father, COMPLETELY laying out for AND catching a touchdown pass WHILE not crushing his 8-year-old granddaughter who'd undercut him while he was in the air. It was epic. After the game I said to my brother, *"can you believe Dad made that catch?"* He said, *"I know but I gotta be honest; I saw him go up for it and all I could think was: This is how it all ends, and what in the world would I say at the funeral?"* ...And of course, we both laughed. But the fact of the matter is there are certain milestones, in life, in which you begin to, at least more frequently, consider issues of life, death, and eternity. My brother is just about to reach that first milestone/ I've only just reached it/that being turning 40. Cuz around when you turn 40, you start to get a sense that, perhaps, you have more life BEHIND than you do in front of you. And I know a lot of you don't know what I'm talking bout, cuz you're under 30 and you think THAT'S a big milestone. It's not! At 30 you still kinda have this illusion of immortality. But there DOES come a time/if you haven't realized it already, when questions of life and death and more specifically life AFTER death - eternal life - become much more front and center...IN PART, that's why we're walking through the Gospel of John together. Cuz IN John, not only do you get a picture of what God in Christ is really like, BUT from Christ/from Jesus Himself, you get some of the clearest imagery and most profound statements ABOUT eternal life. Just in our passage today you see Jesus making a NUMBER of almost crazy claims about who he is and what He's up to with respect to bringing eternal life...CLAIMS that, if you're taking notes, are gonna show you **3 Things: 1. What Eternal Life Actually Is; 2. How It Comes To You, and 3. When You're Experiencing It**...Let's explore those things together.

**TEXT:**

Cuz where we are in John, you recall, is that Jesus has just preached a sermon in front of about 15,000 hungry people, prompting Him to've miraculously turned what was essentially a Hebrew Happy Meal into enough bread and fish to feed the whole crowd. And if you remember, it was such a good miracle that, AFTER-the-fact, the crowd wanted to make Jesus King. Cuz of course a person who can create bread out of nothing can definitely overthrow Rome. But given that His mission was not to be a temporary earthly king, but to instead deal with the root problem from which all brokenness comes, Jesus retreated to a mountain, BEFORE, as we saw 2 weeks ago, miraculously walking on water, in order to deliver His disciples through a storm, across a lake... SOMETHING you see in **vv.24-25** of our text, the crowd gets wind of, and tweets out about, so that people come flocking...on to hear Jesus rebuke em saying, *"you're seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves"* Meaning, this crowd is trying to get near Jesus NOT because they understood the God who was BEFORE them, but because of what they thought Jesus could do FOR them. Like all of us who tend to worship the gifts of God rather

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<sup>1</sup> Works consulted:

- "What Must I Do" - Episode 62 - 9/13/22 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000579314326>  
 - "The Shortsighted" - John 6:14-65 - *Can't Believe* #3 - J.D. Greear  
 - "The Bread of Heaven: Gospel of John, Part 1" - 6/14/91 - John 6:25-35, 48-59; "The Grace of God: Gospel of John, Part 1" - 6/28/91 - John 6:36-47; Discipleship; True & False - Gospel of John, Part 1 - 5/5/91 - John 6:60-71 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

than the Gift-Giver that IS God... So Jesus says, *“that’s not what I’m about.”* The *“work of God,”* He says isn’t about achieving the ideal self, or society, or even getting everything you think you need for a comfortable/happy life, but ABOUT, He says in **v.29**, *“believing in him whom (God) has sent.”* Full Stop! Think about that! The crowd asks Jesus *“what do we need to do to be blessed of God/be happy/get eternal life? Cuz we’ve been trying to do God’s will/adapt our lives to the stuff of God. Trying to find YOU when you go missing. What do we need to do? Unpack Hustle Ideology for us Jesus?”* And all Jesus says is, *“believe in me!”*... Can I tell ya, I’ve been studying theology for going on 20 years now. I even have a degree called a “Master of Divinity,” but that statement right there is a total cage rattler for me. Cuz on the one hand, it’s incredibly frustrating. I mean how do you fit everything about God and life with God into that bucket? But on the other hand, it’s also INCREDIBLY refreshing - to hear that Jesus/the God of the universe isn’t operating on the same merit-demerit system that you and I operate on in EVERY area of life, whereby if you *“do this, you get that.”* And if you *“don’t do this, you don’t get that.”* No! Cuz what Jesus is saying is, *“if you do ANYTHING but believe in me, you DON’T get me/you DON’T get eternal life. And if you DON’T do anything BUT believe in me, you DO get me and DO get eternal life.”* It’s incredible! It’s the absolute OPPOSITE of “hustle ideology” and “comfort culture.” Which is why, you see, the crowd, at first, pushes back there in **vv.30-31**, but then in **v.34** says, *“Sir, give us this bread always.”* They’re like all of us in that they’re kinda attracted to the “bread” or eternal life of which Jesus is speaking, but they’re also sorta repulsed by it, given that it’s not something they can earn and therefore take credit for... Which if you just scan **vv.35-47** there, you see Jesus makes that ABUNDANTLY clear - we CAN’T take credit for it, given that this eternal life - what He calls *“living bread”* - is something that both He and the Father initiate, orchestrate and consummate. A former seminary professor used to say, *“there’s 3 steps to eternal life. First, God draws you to Himself. Second, you realize your need God and you give your life over to Him. And then Third, you realize God did steps 1 & 2 in the first place.”*

In other words, what Jesus is saying - to the dismay of the crowds - is that life with Him/life with God is centered NOT primarily on what you should DO for God, but on TRUSTING what God has DONE for you!... So Jesus goes on to explain - says in **vv.51** and **53** that He’s *“the living bread who came down from heaven. And if anyone eats of this “bread,” they’ll live forever,”* which OF COURSE confused everyone, cuz imagine if I said to you, *“welcome church. We’re here to eat my flesh and drink my blood.”* You’d be like, *“that’s creepy and...no thanks!”* Which is WHY you see in **vv.60** and **66**, many of those who’d BEEN following Jesus to this point, hear that and say, *“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?”* Literally, not *“we can’t understand it,”* but *“this is insulting.”* He was offending their sensibilities, because while WE understand - with hindsight - that “eating Jesus” is symbolic of deeply believing in His saving work on the Cross, since that’s where His body was broken like bread and His blood was shed like water and wine - while WE get that; at this point, the crowds didn’t, such that many began to say, *“I’m outta here!”* **V.66** says, *“After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”*... Which you see, prompts Jesus to turn to His 12 and say in **v.67**, *“Do you wanna go as well?”* Cuz He knows tellin’ people to eat His flesh and drink His blood doesn’t poll well. So Peter - as kinda the spokesman for the group - says something which has to me been one of the most encouraging declarations of faith in the entire Bible/says, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You*

*have the words of eternal life, and we've believed, and we've come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." Translation? "Jesus, we'd love to leave. Because following you is hard! But we can't. Cuz we see that NOTHING in life will EVER satisfy like the ETERNAL life found in you!"*

So **3 Things** I told you this passage shows you ABOUT eternal life. **First, What It Actually Is:** Cuz I think when we hear the phrase "eternal life," our minds tend to go to some idea about simply living forever **right?** Just this week I read a portion of an interview with Christopher Wareham, who's a bioethicist at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. In speaking to The Financial Times, he talked about the very real prospect of being able to develop, what he called, "*a vaccine for the pandemic of...age.*"<sup>2</sup> Basically something that would inoculate us from aging and ultimately death. When we hear "eternal life," that sorta feels like the idea that comes to mind, and PERHAPS why there's been this recurring theme in literature and cinema in which someone discovers some secret to living forever, but in the end, becomes miserable. Cuz of course, there's a major difference between mere existence and really living **right?** If you were to exist forever, but didn't have real life, then you'd quite literally be talking about the definition of...hell! That's, in-part, how the Bible DESCRIBES hell - as existing forever, but apart from the God in whom all life is found. That's why when Jesus speaks, repeatedly, about "eternal life" here, He's not talking about a quantity of time - that would be external existence - He's talking about a QUALITY of life that He wants for you to begin enjoying now, and which will grow and last forever. That's why in Greek there's two words for "life." There's the word "bios" from which we get our word "biology," and which obviously refers to biological, physical existence. And there's the word "zoe," which is the word for quality of life. Zoe is the word Jesus uses here when talking about eternal life! In other words, the energy, exhilaration, joy, purpose which gives real meaning TO life! Ya know, the things you have to have to not just survive, but really thrive. That's why Jesus calls it "*bread.*" Because it's the real sustenance in life that FRANKLY, ya can't find outside of Jesus. Cuz ya see there in **v.27** when Jesus says, "*don't work for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.*" **See that?** That's Jesus acknowledging that you and I have options with respect to finding life. And we know this. You can try and find happiness, meaning, LIFE in things like health and beauty, career success, financial security, various pleasures, really any number of things. The problem is: ALL those things ultimately "*perish.*" You get older and lose your looks. You get laid off and lose your career success/your financial security. Or maybe you don't. Maybe you actually achieve incredible success only to find, like everyone does at some point, that it's never enough. Like John D Rockefeller, who was the Jeff Bezos of the early 1900s said when asked how much money was enough... "*Just one more dollar.*" It's never enough BECAUSE it all ALL perishes. It's ALL a kind of false zoe. Jesus says, "*don't work/don't give your life for something that's ultimately gonna spoil.*" I mean, if you knew every investment you made in a particular stock or bond was gonna cause you to lose money, don't you think you'd think twice about investing IN that stock or bond? Of course! And that's what Jesus is saying. He's saying, you gotta think twice about where you're finding your life. Where you're saying, "*If I could just have that...then that would be living.*" Cuz if it's anything but Him as the "*bread of heaven*", then it's gonna spoil,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://futurism.com/elderly-billionaires-immortal-compounding-wealth-forever>

and in spoiling leave you bitter, cynical, depressed, or just exhausted from having worked so hard for it. **Eternal life is a kind of radically good quality of life that's ONLY found in Jesus. Do ya have/are you enjoying that life?**

**Second, How Then Does Eternal Life Come To You?** And the answer is, very simply...by grace! But let me explain that because a lot of times when we say something is "by grace" we sorta give off the impression that it's super mystical and sorta comes to you like a really profound thought in the shower does. But if you look in **vv.36-47** you notice that when Jesus talks about us receiving eternal life, He does so by essentially saying 2 things: **One**, that you can't make yourself receive it. But **Two**, if you HAVE received it, you can never lose it! For example and with respect to not being able to make yourself receive it; look in **v.36**; He says, *"But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe."* **What's He saying?** Cuz He's obviously NOT saying that these folks/you and I CAN'T believe in Jesus. Obviously, they could since Jesus was right in front of em. Rather, it's that they didn't WANT to believe in Jesus. The Apostle Paul says it like this later in **Romans 3:10-11**, *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."* Later in **Romans 8:7**, *"the sinful mind or mind that's set merely on things of this material world is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot."* What Paul and Jesus are saying is that, naturally speaking, you and I/NO person is capable of making themselves WANT to trust and follow Jesus. Like if you were given a thousand choices - NOT ONCE out of a thousand would you/OR I choose to unconditionally obey and submit to God's law/His way of living. We just won't do it...It's like if I gave you a choice about what to eat and then presented you with two options. The first option is the most delicious piece of meat you could ever imagine - steak, chicken, fish - whatever your favorite is - cooked to perfection and complete with your favorite side and dessert. That's the first option. And the second is a bowl of chopped lizard parts covered in fly excrement. Those are your two options...I can promise you that 100x out of 100 you're gonna choose the first option! We all would! And not because you CAN'T choose the lizard, but because you don't WANT to choose it...Friend, to the natural, sinful, human mind, choosing to trust-in and submit to God is like choosing lizard parts. It seems crazy and distasteful. Which is WHY you see in **v.44** Jesus says, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."* The ONLY way you/ ANYONE can come to receive and enjoy eternal life...in Christ is by grace!

But **Two**, if you HAVE received it, by God's grace, you can never lose it! Cuz look in **vv.37 and 39**. Jesus says, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will NEVER cast out...This is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose NOTHING of all that he's given me."* **You see that?** Friend, the good news of the Gospel is not only that it COMES to you by grace - as one person said, *"that God isn't out there dangling the carrot of forgiveness and eternal life, until He's satisfied with the seriousness of your repentance"*<sup>3</sup> - but ALSO that you're KEPT by grace! As the song says, *"If you're not holding God up, you can't let Him down."*...And that's SUCH good news **isn't it?** Because if grace is merely what gets you INTO relationship with God/grants you eternal life, but then doesn't KEEP you there - cuz it's your

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm7PbNzOV8p/>

performance, discipline, spiritual growth, that keeps you there - then really all the Christian life is, is getting saved in order to become someone who eventually doesn't need a Savior... which is CLEARLY the opposite of what Jesus is saying here when He says that both you coming to Him AND you being kept IN Him is totally under His jurisdiction! Totally by grace!

Now I know you might be thinking, *"That seems strange. Like if you can't TRULY fall away from God/TRULY wander away from God once you've been brought into life with Him by grace, then why not live any way you want? I mean, if it's really true that a real Christian can never ACTUALLY be lost or fall under condemnation; then there's no incentive to live a holy life right?"* And it's a good question, EXCEPT that believing it means you don't really understand in the first place. For example, we all know there's plenty of men out there/sadly, tons of em in our neighborhood, who are really wonderful to women. Kind, compassionate, understanding, willing to take em out, don't expect em to dress inappropriately in order to be liked. Just wonderful... UNTIL they've got that woman's heart. At which point, they THEN lose interest and stop serving. If you ever find a man like that, just understand: he never loved that woman/never loved you. He was just using you... In the same way, if once you realize that God's grace means: You can't nullify His grace, and that you're absolutely secure and free from condemnation and can't be lost no matter what; if that causes you to lose your incentive for living a godly/moral/holy life, then ya likely wanted OR had eternal life in the first place.

The way eternal life comes to you is by grace - both grace to get you to receive it AND grace to keep you IN it. And once you realize that/that you'd never choose it, but also can't lose it, there's a kind of sweetness that begins to permeate your life! Because in seeing that it's only by God's grace that you've been brought in, pride and superiority get excluded. Cuz there's nothing for which you can take credit. AND in seeing that it's only by God's grace that you're kept IN, shame and inferiority get excluded. Cuz there's no amount of spiritual bankruptcy that'll get you evicted from God's love, acceptance and eternal life. You see? **It comes to you ALL by grace!**

So **Finally, How Do You Know WHEN You're Experiencing Eternal Life:** Cuz if you look throughout this passage, you see LOTS of people who APPEAR to experience it, but who in the end... miss it. For example, in **vv.26, 34**, you've got folks, who by all accounts LOOK like Christ-followers, but to whom Jesus says, *"you don't believe/you're just following me because of what you think I can do for you."* Similarly, in **v.28**, when the crowd asks Jesus *"What they need to do to be doing the works of God,"* you could almost read that as trying to atone for their shortcomings. People FULL of guilt at how they've fallen short and are just hoping to be TOLD what they can do in order to make up for it. Cuz of course, PLENTY of people follow Jesus NOT for Jesus' sake, but simply to assuage guilt. Or just in **vv.30,31** and **52**, when the crowds are arguing with Jesus, it's almost like they're saying, *"Jesus we'll follow you as long as we're right!"* Cuz of course, there's all kinds of folks for whom Jesus isn't their source of life, but their source of moral superiority. The point is: you got all kinds of people, who LOOK like they're experiencing eternal life - "are in the church" - but who actually miss it! **So how do you know?**

Real briefly, ya know because of the metaphor which Jesus uses and the example Peter gives. Cuz notice, the metaphor Jesus uses for eternal life and relationship with Him... is food **right?**

Throughout, He calls it: “*Food that endures to eternal life,*” “*spiritual manna,*” “*bread from heaven,*” “*bread of life,*” “*living bread,*” “*eating His flesh and drinking His blood.*” Those are all food metaphors. Because the deal with food is: For it to take effect, it has to be digested! Has to be received and taken into your center. It can’t just be looked at or known about. You have to actually digest it so that it becomes what gives you energy to keep going, and makes you tick, and ultimately sustains you...Or if I could say it another way: The difference between all the people who LOOKED the part of experiencing eternal life and those who actually DID - in other words, the difference between all the false Christians/false disciples and the true ones - is that the false ones never came to grips with the authority and Lordship of Jesus. Which is to say, they kept Jesus on the periphery of their lives rather than taking Him into the center and letting HIM be the center of everything! That’s why they tell Jesus that what He’s saying is “*too hard of a saying*”/it’s not palatable, and they ultimately depart! They didn’t wanna release control of their lives OR some area of their lives to Jesus’ Lordship!...But Peter though, you see in **vv.67-69**, HE sees the claims of Jesus - the magnitude of eternal life in Jesus - and doesn’t deny that what Jesus is saying is hard, but ACTUALLY admits that it’s TOO hard for him. That he DOESN’T have the resources to gain real life on his own, and consequently MUST turn to Jesus. As he says, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we’ve believed, and’ve come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*” **You see that?** He’s experiencing what EVERY person who ever really takes Jesus into their center experiences - the good sense of being graciously...trapped. Trapped, because while you know that there are all kinds of other options for you in which to “find life;” you also know that NONE of those options will ever be anything, false, perishing, dead-ends. And so even when it’s hard - like Peter - you place your trust in Jesus AND continue trusting Jesus, believing not only that He was WILLING to bring you to Him in the first place - as ultimately evidenced by His willingness to die for you - but that He’s ABLE to keep you IN Him in the last place - as evidenced by His ability to rise from the dead. **Have you wonderfully come upon that dead-end?** Cuz THAT’S when you know you’re experiencing His eternal life!...**Let’s Pray...**