

JESUS GIVES US ETERNAL LIFE

John 10:22-42

Key Verse: 10:28

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

As we survey John’s gospel we find that Jesus often taught at festivals in Jerusalem. These festivals pointed to the Messiah. In chapter 2, shortly after John testified that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus was at the Passover during which lambs were sacrificed. There Jesus prophesied his death and resurrection through which he became the temple. In chapter 5, at a festival in Jerusalem, Jesus healed a paralytic man on the Sabbath. Then he taught that he has authority to give life and to judge. A significant portion of John’s gospel, 7:1-10:21 takes place during the Festival of Tabernacles. At that festival, Jesus invited anyone who is thirsty to come to him and drink, and proclaimed that he is the light of the world, the “I Am” who was before Abraham, the good shepherd, and the gate. Jesus also healed a man born blind. In today’s passage, Jesus is at the Feast of Dedication. The remainder of John’s gospel, excluding the epilogue, takes place during the Passover. Through these festivals, Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah so that the people may believe in him and have life (20:31).

In today’s passage, the word “believe” is repeated six times. Four times it is used in conjunction with “not.” Once it is used in reference to Jesus’ works, and once in reference to his person. Jesus is speaking to people who don’t believe. Yet he does not mention the consequence of not believing. He emphasizes the great blessing for those who believe: eternal life and real security. Jesus also tells us the secret to believing, and gives some evidence for belief. Believing in Jesus is much deeper than mere mental assent, which is superficial and hardly impacts our lives. Instead of living to the full, as Jesus wants us to, we are bound by the pursuit of worldly security and live in anxiety and fear. We lack God’s vision or purpose for life and tend to be selfish and petty. Belief in Jesus should transform our hearts and minds and be reflected in our value system, lifestyle and life direction. One young woman said she believed in Jesus. But in considering marriage with a Christian man she became very uneasy. Only by growing in faith could she establish a godly family. Our faith in Jesus should grow deep and strong. Do we really believe in Jesus and his promise from our hearts? Is this belief accompanied by assurance of eternal life? Is it changing the way we live practically? As we study this passage, let’s think about what it really means to believe in Jesus and his promise.

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First, Jesus promises eternal life and true security (22-30). This event takes place during the Festival of Dedication in Jerusalem. This festival is not found in the Old Testament. It began during the time between the testaments. It celebrated the restoration of temple worship after its utter desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 167 B.C. A type of antichrist, Epiphanes put a pig, an unclean animal, in the temple, where only God should be present. In this way he wanted to eradicate temple worship and the Torah and impose Greek culture in Israel. However, Judas Maccabeus led Israel in a victorious resistance that resulted in a restoration of temple worship. The festival of dedication commemorated that event and was also called the Festival of Lights. Tradition says that when it was first celebrated, the temple lamp burned miraculously for eight days with just one day's portion of oil. Jewish families commemorate this by lighting special multi-branched lamps during the feast. We know these as menorahs, and the feast as Hanukah, which is celebrated at Christmas time. This lamp is an important symbol, but it does not give light forever. Jesus is the light of the world; his light shines forever.

Verse 22b says, **“It was winter.”** As fall had given way to winter, so the spiritual climate of Jerusalem had also changed. Previously, Jesus proclaimed that he was the Messiah by word and deed. In response, the Jewish leaders engaged him. Now it is not Jesus who initiates with a positive offer, but the Jewish leaders who come to Jesus making a demand while he was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade (23). They gathered around him, saying, **“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly”** (24). They claimed that Jesus was keeping them in suspense, yet it was due to their own unbelief. They knew there was something extraordinary about Jesus' words, works and character; they could not ignore Jesus. But they did not believe in Jesus. Many people in our time are also in suspense in regard to Jesus. They do not profess faith in him for fear of losing worldly friends or the pleasures of sin. They worry about negative peer pressure or criticism. They know there is something good in Jesus, so they try to associate with Christians. But inwardly they fail to trust Christ and are in suspense. Being in suspense while watching a movie is okay, but being in suspense about Jesus leads to terrible consequences.

How did Jesus respond to these people? He said, **“I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep”** (25-26). Here, Jesus' words “you are not my sheep,” are sobering. When the Jewish leaders failed to believe Jesus, they missed the chance to have a spiritual relationship with him. Now, instead of being under his protection as their good shepherd, they were vulnerable to the devil.

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Jesus' words indicate that without the mercy of his Father, who is sovereign, they were lost. Still, Jesus did not abandon them. Instead, he taught them the blessedness of being his sheep.

Jesus said, **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me”** (27). Jesus' sheep are recognized by one characteristic only. It is not hard work, talent or activity. It is that they listen to his voice. This is how faith begins to grow. Romans 10:17 says, **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”** This faith then spawns awareness of the presence of Christ who knows us. His knowledge is an intimate, deep and thorough understanding expressed in love. When the Samaritan woman listened to Jesus, she found that he knew everything about her, and still loved her unconditionally (4:29). When we experience this love, it elicits our trust and we can follow Jesus. As we follow Jesus more and more, we find our true identity, purpose and direction, and live under his protection and guidance. Before knowing Jesus, we are all lost. We look around in vain seeking the things we need. We have deep unfulfilled longings in our hearts that nothing in the world can satisfy. But at the moment we meet Jesus, we find our Creator and Shepherd and have deep satisfaction and security in him.

In order to have faith in Jesus, we must listen to his voice. Everyone listens to someone. But to whom we listen makes a big difference. Consider Adoniram Judson. He was the son of a congregational pastor and a praying mother. They often shared God's word with him and prayed for him. Yet he did not listen to them, but to a brilliant college classmate who turned him toward deism. He cast off moral restraint and indulged his flesh. One night, as he tried to sleep in a country inn, he was troubled by the cries of a dying man in the next room. He tried to comfort himself by imagining how his deist friend would deal with this, but it did not help. The fear of death began to rise within him. The next day he found the man had died. To his surprise, it was his deist friend! He realized that listening to that man had led him away from God into a lost condition. Then he began to seek God as a matter of life and death. By God's grace, he came to faith in Christ and later gave his life as a missionary to Burma. Many voices clamor for attention in our times. Whom we listen to makes a great difference. Accordingly, we will either be damaged and destroyed, or built up and empowered. We should listen to Jesus. Listening to Jesus transforms us inwardly and changes our destiny from death to life (5:24).

As we listen to Jesus, he gives us a great promise of blessing. Let's read verse 28: **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will**

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snatch them out of my hand.” Eternal life! It sounds great. What does it mean? Is it an eternal continuation of this life? If so, some people would say, “I don’t want that.” No one wants to experience the same sickness, sorrow, suffering, sin and shame of this life forever. Don’t worry. It does not mean that. Here “eternal life” comes from the Greek word “zoe,” not “bios.” It refers to a quality of life; it is life with Jesus. Jesus himself makes his dwelling in our hearts. Jesus gives us joy in the midst of pain, peace though we are hard-pressed on all sides, and satisfaction of soul even in the most trying circumstances. Life with Jesus is life to the full. It is dynamic and powerful and has absolute meaning and purpose. We grow constantly in the image of Jesus and bear fruit, within and without. Not only do we enjoy Jesus now, we also have assurance of everlasting life. This makes us feel wealthier than Bill Gates. We are free from the allure of earthly treasures. We are willing to sacrifice for Jesus. St. Paul wrote: **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”** (2 Cor 4:16-18). Sometimes we feel a sense of loss after sacrificing for Jesus and not seeing visible results. This is the very time to fix our eyes on what is unseen. Let’s listen to Jesus’ word: **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”**

How can we be sure that Jesus can keep this promise? Jesus said in verses 29-30: **“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”** These verses indicate that Jesus is God incarnate. Jesus is almighty and the author of life. So he is able to give us eternal life and to protect us from any enemy who wants to snatch us from him. This inspired St. Paul to sing a song of victory: **“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Ro 8:37-39).

As we realize that Jesus loves us and has given us eternal life that no one can take away, our hearts burn with love for Jesus and we can serve him sacrificially. C.T. Studd wrote this: “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.” Adoniram Judson wrote: “Life is short. Happiness consists not in outward circumstances. Millions of Burmans are perishing. I am almost the only person who is able to communicate with them the

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way of salvation. How great are my obligations to spend and be spent for Christ! What a privilege to be allowed to serve him...and suffer for him...But in myself I am absolute nothingness... Soon we shall be in heaven. Oh let us live as we shall then wish we had done!”

Second, Jesus gives evidence for believing that he is the Messiah (31-42).

Though Jesus had given a wonderful promise of eternal life, the Jewish leaders took offense and picked up stones to stone him (31). Perhaps they carried stones in their pockets. Jesus said to them, **“I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”** (32) They did not deny that Jesus had done good works. But they could not accept Jesus’ claim to be God, and regarded this as blasphemy (33). We can understand. Most people regard Jesus as a great teacher or healer. But believing that he is God is another matter. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we cannot believe that Jesus is God (Mt 16:17; 1 Cor 12:3b). Believing that Jesus is God is the essence of Christian faith. Sadly, not everyone believes. But Jesus gives clear evidence that gives everyone the opportunity to believe. In verses 34-42, we can find three evidences.

First of all, Jesus gives the evidence of Scripture (34-36). In verses 34-36 Jesus quotes, interprets and applies Psalm 82:6. He especially emphasizes the use of the word “gods” by the author. While it is debatable to whom this refers, the most plain and likely case is to the people of Israel who received the Psalm. When they received the word of God they became “gods” or the “sons of God.” In that sense, there was a Biblical basis for calling mere men “gods” or “children of God.” How much more does Jesus, the Word become flesh, deserve to be called the Son of God. Jesus’ use of the word “set apart” in verse 36 is also noteworthy. It means to dedicate fully to God. Jesus is the one whom God dedicated from all eternity, to be the meeting place of God and man, the sanctuary in and through whom God may be approached and worshiped. Thus, Jesus fulfills the Feast of Dedication. So both Scripture, and the feast itself, point to the truth that Jesus is God’s Son.

Here we learn Jesus’ view of Scripture. He said, **“...and Scripture cannot be set aside”** (35b). Jesus recognized the authority of Old Testament Scripture. He submitted to its authority himself, as can be seen when he was tempted by the devil and quoted Scripture, applying it to himself (Mt 4:4,7,10). He submitted to the Old Testament in the fulfillment of his mission. He found himself as both the suffering servant of Isaiah and the Son of Man mentioned by Daniel. In his controversial debates with the religious leaders, Jesus always appealed to Scripture for the final word. In John 5:39, Jesus said, **“These are the very Scriptures that testify about me....”** The Old Testament scripture points to Jesus. The key message of Scripture

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is found in John 3:16 which says, **“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.”** Jesus stood firm in the midst of controversy by holding on to Scripture which cannot be set aside. We can learn from Jesus. When we stand on the promises of God, especially in the midst of controversy, his word gives us assurance of victory and great confidence to serve him. If we lack assurance in our faith, it is time to hold onto God’s word. As we do, our feet are set on a rock more solid than the ground we stand on. Jesus said, **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”** (Mt 24:34).

Secondly, Jesus gives the evidence of his works (37-39). Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders would not listen to his claims, though validated by Scripture. But he did not give up on them. He appealed to them on the basis of his works, saying, **“Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father”** (37-38). Here Jesus teaches us that his works are further evidence that lead us to see God in him. This is what he really wants us to believe. The seven miraculous signs were given for this purpose. Despite the evidence that Jesus offered, the Jews remained hard-hearted. Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp, because Jesus’ time had not yet come (39).

Last of all, John testifies that Jesus is God (40-42). Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed, and many people came to him. They said, **“Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true”** (40-41). John testified that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29), that he received and would baptize with the Holy Spirit, and that he was God’s Chosen One (1:32-34). John further testified that Jesus was from above (3:31), that he speaks the words of God (3:34), and that he is the Son of God who gives eternal life (3:36). Those who humbly listened to John’s testimony could believe that Jesus is the Savior and have life in his name (42; Lk 7:29-30).

When we believe in Jesus, he gives us eternal life. It is life with him which bears much fruit. It is eternal life in the kingdom of God. Assurance of this motivates us to love and serve Jesus with all our hearts and strength. Let’s hear Jesus’ word, **“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”**