

“The Last Word on Life-We Live”- John 3:16, John 14:1-4, Revelation 21:1-5, 15-18

In one of his Far Side cartoons, Gary Larson depicts a winged man sitting in heaven on a cloud. No one is near. There is nothing to do. The guy is marooned on a cloud and the caption reads, “Wish I’d brought a magazine.” I think we can relate. Eternal life? Clouds in our midst, harps on our laps, and time, lots of time on our hands. An endless sing-along with hymns, then the chorus, and then more verses. We might have similar reservations. Will eternity meet my expectations? Can heaven deliver on its promises?

We have been looking at a most famous of biblical verses: John 3:16. We have seen four things promised from this verse: God loves, God gives, we believe, and the last one that we are going to look this morning is we live. ...’those who believe will not perish but have everlasting or eternal life. So what exactly is that we have to look forward to? So what is eternal life?

Let me tell you what eternal life is not. It is not failed hopes. It is not expectations that sputter and flop. It is not the boyfriend who at first appears to be wearing shining-armor who becomes a heart-breaking two-timer. It is not the “if only” of life. If only I could find the right mate. If only I could make more money. If only I had a better job or a more satisfying career. If only I could afford that bigger house or the new car. Eternal life is not life that is promised through beer, perfumes, and jewelry. Instead Jesus offers us zoe. Zoe is a Greek word meaning life intensive. Jesus talks less about life’s duration and more about its quality, vitality, energy, and fulfillment. Jesus reconnects our soul with God. You remember the story of Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God. God took them and put them outside the Garden of Eden and then he shut the gate tight. Ever since then we have been deep down looking inside the gate hoping to get back in. We have tried everything to get back in but nothing has worked. Until we can find true meaning in life we will not get back in. We need the assurance of eternal life. We not only need assurance of eternal life but we need assurance of a rich life that we can live right now, today. So how do we look at a rich life now and eternal life later?

Jesus gave a great explanation to this, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you. When everything is ready I’ll come back to get you.”

Jesus goes on in the book of Revelation to describe what heaven will be like. The New Jerusalem will have jaw dropping dimensions. 1400 miles square. It will be large enough to contain all of the land from the Appalachian Mountains to California and from Canada to Mexico. This is just the ground floor. The city will stand as tall as it is wide. There will be ample room for billions of people to come and go. Come and go people will because the gates will never be closed.

We will be at our best forever. We will also enjoy everyone else at their prime. There will be no bad days. All gossip and jealousy will be banished. God will get rid of all of the orneriness from our souls. No one will doubt our word, questions our motives, or speak evil behind your back. There will be great reunions in heaven of families separated by death. There will be forgiveness of hurts in this life. There will be great reconciliations. . There will be no thieves, divorce, heartbreak, and no boredom. We won’t be bored in heaven because you won’t be the same person in heaven. We won’t be self-centered, tiredness, information overload, meaningless activity that very often brings on boredom here.

Until we can experience heaven as we find it described we have to live in this world, but we can truly live life waiting to go to heaven. Jesus breathes life into our flat-lined lives. Because Jesus has been raised from the dead we have been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a life in heaven. We can trust God because he has reinstated us to Garden-of Eden status. The flagship family walked with God; we can too. They heard his voice; so can we. They were naked and unashamed; we can be transparent and unafraid. No more running and hiding.

Can Jesus actually replace death with life? He did a convincing job with his own. We can trust him because he has been there. He lived a difficult life that we sometimes live. He has been to the grave not as a visitor, but as a body. He

came back to life and one day we too will come back to life, eternal life. Jesus is preparing for each of us a place: A perfect place of perfected people overseen by a perfect God.

Over the last four weeks we have been looking at one of the most famous verses in the Bible: John 3:16. We discovered four things about this verse: God loves, God gives, we believe and we live. But before we leave I want us to look at John 3:17, an overlooked verse. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

Jesus came in love to save, heal, and to offer spiritual birth. He did not come to condemn or judge. Many people are turned off to the Christian faith because in their ears and in their hearts they hear condemnation. For many God becomes a judging old man with a long white beard sitting on a throne ready to judge and condemn. We see people who call themselves Christian pass judgement on others. No wonder people sometimes are turned off by who we are and what we say as Christians. We love to quote John 3:16, but we sometimes forget there is a John 3:17. He offer us these words of hope

But after he offers all of this there is an issue. Now we must decide. Nicodemus needed to decide. What do we need to decide? We need to decide to give up our sometimes rebellious pride. Give up and receive God. We need to say that Jesus is our hope not the material and other things we cling to as hope. We need to give up the darkness and come into the light because sometimes we think and do evil. Earlier I mentioned that we have been out of the Garden of Eden and God wants to put us back there again. We have loitered outside of the gates of the Garden of Eden too long.

John 3:16, 17 can be best summarized by an old joke. How many Christians does it take to change a light-bulb? It takes 10 Pentecostals: one to change the bulb and 9 to pray the darkness away. It takes no Roman Catholics because they use candles only. It takes 15 Baptists: one to change the bulb and 14 to approve the change in committee. It takes no Lutherans because they don't believe in change. It takes 3 Episcopalians: one to change the bulb and two to sit around talking about how good the old one was. It takes an undetermined number of

Methodists because whether you have a bright bulb, a dull bulb, or a bulb that is out you are loved. You can bring a light bulb, a turnip bulb, or a tulip bulb. It doesn't matter all are loved and accepted. Come as you are and also bring a covered dish.

John 3:16 is just these words: Come as you are. Millions read the verse John 3:16 and millions walk away from it. There are only a handful of people who trust its words. Perhaps they think there is a catch. Maybe they are not needy enough for God. Take Jesus' offer to get on board. Say yes to him. Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. Thanks be to God who will be present one day at our death. He cares too much not to be. Believe in him and you will not perish but have life, eternal life forever.