

Pako Evening Service: 09/10/16

Scripture Readings: Mat 25:31-46; 1 Cor 2:6-16; Sermon: "Everlasting life"

Congregation, we know as Christians that we have the surety of eternal life. Of course, we also know that many in this world don't believe in eternal life. Richard Dawkins for instance believes that the Christian talk about the eternity of the soul causes unnecessary anguish for people. Matter of fact he suggests that children as young as five are being bored with the thought that what they have been doing ten times day, they will have to keep doing for an eternity. According to Richard Dawkins, people cannot cope with the thought of being conscious for an eternity. Further, he suggests that most Scottish people cannot cope with more than three hours a time of being conscious.

Well, we know better. But it does leave the question, whether the thought of eternal life actually comforts us? For the Christian, everlasting life is a beautiful thought and an amazing truth as well as being a present reality. As Paul reminds us, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. However, there is also a dreadful alternative! The thought of an everlasting life of punishment for all those who reject the Lord Jesus as Saviour certainly doesn't give us any comfort. On the contrary it causes us unceasing anguish.

Then again, you may be thinking, "Well I don't reject Jesus, but neither am I into all this stuff about Jesus and eternal life." Well dear friend, what are you into? Do I need to remind you that the ratio of death is one out of one? It is no good being undecided or a fence sitter! That will not do. The parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins makes that perfectly clear! Indeed, Scripture is full of parables and direct teaching that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead!

Now I have come across people, including some Christians, who refuse to believe that there is an everlasting punishment for non-believers. They reason, "How can God be a God of love and then sentence a non-believer to eternal punishment?" They say that is cruel and so they 'console' themselves by speaking about annihilation or total destruction. There are others who flippantly say that if there is a place of eternal punishment it won't be too bad, for they will be joining their mates. I don't find that in Scripture anywhere.

What I do find is Scripture's reference to two possible everlasting realities. Matthew 25:46 mentions both, "Then they (the wicked) will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." The reward of eternal glory is for those who have forsaken all for Christ's sake. Luke reminds us in 18:30, "They shall receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life." So, the question before us is whether this reality of eternal life in glory comforts us? For us to answer that in the affirmative, we need to know how to attain it. We need to know for only one of the two everlasting realities presents us with an outcome that gives great comfort!

First, let us say from the outset, that we cannot not attain it as such. This eternal life of joy and bliss is not our reward for keeping God's law, or because we are such good people, or attend the right church. When all is said and done, it is a wonderful gift of God's grace to us. Eternal life has been won for us through the death and resurrection of God's Son. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus himself said, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14:6). So it is through Jesus that one can attain an eternal life of glory and bliss and praise to God. What is needed is belief that Jesus has done that for us. And that to is a work of grace. God in his electing love has quickened us to life!

Secondly, what is this everlasting life? What is its 'total' after all, life is a profound mystery? Worldly philosophers define life as 'the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations.' And although there is some truth to this definition it is deficient for it does not include the author and fountain of life, God himself. This is the difficulty with people who define things apart from knowledge of God such as Richard Dawkins and the like. They limit life down to man and the world of his experience.

The Bible does not offer a definition on life perse. One definition that gets close is found in Acts 17:28 where Paul tells the religious people that it is in "God we live and move and have our being!" For our God is a living, active God and activity is an expression of life. And this activity is true in the deepest sense of God. Unlike idols that cannot hear, speak or act, God is the living God. At his wrath the earth trembles. All that is in God is eternally and infinitely active. He does not slumber or sleep. He hears, He sees, He wills, He loves and He hates. If he were to withdraw for a moment, we would be history. However, not only is He the living God in himself, but also by his quickening Spirit, He is the fountain and author of life. It pleased God to reveal this life in the highest degree to man. God formed man out of the

dust of the ground and breathed life into his nostrils. Man was made in God's image and to live in harmony with his Creator and one another.

Yet, eternal life is more than that and in John 17:3 we have a great definition "Now this eternal life, that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Some people suggest that eternal life is what Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden before they sinned. Well, it may have been very good, but eternal life is better because Jesus Christ is the source of eternal life. Furthermore, eternal life as the redeemed is better for the possibility to sin has been taken away! That the Creator God became man in the person of His Son, is the most intimate union between God the Creator and man the creature. To be in Christ is life. He is the life and the resurrection as Mary and Martha beheld.

When the Word was made flesh, the first witnesses beheld his glory, full of grace and truth. This wonderful revelation of the living God was not experienced by Adam nor could he ever attain to it. It is only those who have seen Jesus that have seen the Father and know life. Everlasting life is to know God through Christ. Without Christ we cannot know God, and without God we cannot have any comfort from the profession that we believe in everlasting life. So in essence, to have this 'comfort' of eternal life, one must know God and his love to man in Jesus Christ.

Now the thing we need to grasp is that we can experience to a degree the present joy of eternal life as well as the future reality of eternal life. We tend to think that eternal life begins the day we die, and that's true in its fullest sense, but we can already experience the beginning of eternal joy now! Eternal life is not just a future reality, but for the believer a present reality.

Again Scripture has ample evidence. Allow me just to highlight a few. John 3: 36, "Whoever believes in the Son HAS eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John 6:47, "I tell you the truth, he who believes HAS everlasting life." John 6:54, "Jesus said to them, 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood HAS eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day'" This joy and comfort can be only known by people who know Jesus Christ. It is to know that Jesus has done all that was required to gain eternal life of bliss for his followers. God has given us eternal life and it is in his Son. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life [1 Jn 5:11-12).

So, by Biblical standards, those who refuse to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour, only have a future to look forward to where God will be absent. People sometimes say they are doing all right without God now so not to worry about them. But they are wrong. We continue to be concerned for them for while they live and breathe this side of the grave they are never living for a moment without experiencing God's common grace, which is poured out on all mankind. We want them to acknowledge that and God's love for them in Christ.

Because Scripture teaches that when they take their last breath without Christ as Saviour, they will experience living without God and that dear friend would be an awful reality. Knowing that some family and close friends are physically alive yet refusing to come to the Tree of Life makes our present joy less than perfect, sometimes down right distressing.

It is distressing to know that the prince of this world has deluded them to such an extent to think they don't need a Saviour. For Scripture clearly teaches that there is a place of eternal torment, where there will be gnashing of teeth (Mat 25:30) and it is my God given duty to speak about these things plainly.

So I don't want anyone leaving here this evening thinking that death is the end and that life in hell is only a clever idea of a theologian's wild fantasy or imagination as Richard Dawkins suggests. Everlasting life in hell is a reality for all those who do not know God through Christ. No comfort in that at all! For the Christian, after this life we will have perfect blessedness. I cannot fully describe what that will be. 1 Cor 2:9 tells us that "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

Christians can only know the blessedness of eternal life for the Holy Spirit reveals it to them. Yet, we only know in part. It will be beyond anything human senses can predict or imagine. It involves much more than what we have received already in coming to know Christ. We know that the environment will be such that it will be perfect for praising God eternally. One thing I think is helpful and that is to avoid thinking about heaven in purely humanistic ways. Most people's questions about heaven are man-centred! Will we have this or will we have that, or is there sex, shall we know everyone in heaven? The danger is that we 'knock' God off his throne when we think purely on this level.

Congregation I cannot answer all the questions about what heaven will be like. Perhaps we should ask, "How can we bring glory to God when we are in heaven?" For God is at the centre of heaven on his throne now and will be for

eternity. He will dwell with his people. We will be his people and He will be our God! He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, no illness, no darkness, no injustice, our inheritance will not perish, spoil or fade, for the old order of things has passed away! In fact, when we are in heaven we will be more like Jesus and we will praise God eternally! And the goal of our earthly life and our heavenly life is really no different. It is the glory of God. John Piper in his book, "Let the nations be glad" makes the profound comment, "One day missions will end, but worship will never end."

In heaven we will thank and praise him for what he has done and for who he is more perfectly! We will rejoice more perfectly. Not just in the gifts but also the giver whom we will embrace. He will be everything for everybody, all in all. So what place does God the Father have in your life? Have you come to love Him through Christ? I trust that all of us can say that God is the centre of our lives and that we love him in Christ for then the thought of eternal life will comfort us greatly!

And if you cannot, don't despair but don't delay in acknowledging Jesus as Lord and what he has done for you and enjoy eternal life to the praise and glory of God the Father forever with us. Let me close with two things. First, I don't know about you, but as great as we know heaven will be for Christians, for me, while I remain in this body it seems to remain a constant struggle to keep my priorities in the right order. Thankfully there is forgiveness. One way that I find helpful in this struggle is to keep fixing my eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross for me! It's the only way to run the race, to stop drifting and to reach the finish.

Second, when we know the joy of heaven that awaits us, we need to be mission minded. Yes, we need to be winsome, agreed. Nor must we ever regard anyone as being beyond God's grace. After all, at one time we were dead people walking and he changed us from being his enemies to loving Him.

The Holy Spirit has to do his work, so keep praying for them, keep loving them, and when you have an opportunity to speak about the things of eternal life, do so, but with gentleness and respect. May our Saviour God be pleased to convert them through the power of his Word and Spirit! Amen.