

Eternal Life



The Gospels frequently report Jesus' claim to be the source of eternal life. But what is eternal life? This is perhaps the most fundamental question to grapple with in order to understand the gospel.

Over the years the gospel has frequently been regarded as simply the assurance of life after death. It is true that Jesus offer of life includes resurrection from the dead but if that were all, then what would be the point of the rest of our mortal lives?

I propose here that the eternal life that Jesus offers is something about the quality of our existence both now and forever. Relationship with Jesus equates to relationship with God. That which is connected to God is fully alive and that which isn't is in some way dead.

Ezekiel's vision of dry bones supports this thought. The bones rise up, gain flesh and skin but do not live until they receive the breath of God. Breath, wind and Spirit are in Hebrew covered by the same word, and through Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit.

In fact the whole Bible story seems to encompass this theme of life in God and death outside of Him. God creates life; human beings choose to live independently, a choice that introduces death into the whole of creation. God then chooses to reconnect with the people of Israel and their story is also one of life and death. In relationship with God they have life. In rebellion to God they are subject to death or exile at the hands of enemies or by plague and famine. The writings of the prophets starkly outline the consequences of life apart from God.

But what do these thoughts contribute to our lives today? From an individual perspective we all know that our lives are not yet perfect. We carry within us both life and death. Paul expresses this idea in Romans 7. In stating his inability to obey God's law he concludes – 'What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue

me from this body of death?' He responds to his own question; 'Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

As Christians we are in the process of gaining eternal life in the here and now or as Paul puts it elsewhere, working out our salvation (Phil 2:12-13). The more we get of Jesus' Spirit the more alive we are. But this theme also has a corporate perspective. Communities or kingdoms that are separated from or opposed to the will of God will be subject to experiences of death. Our own nation is now unashamedly secular and I believe we are encountering experiences of spiritual death and fragmentation. Breakdown of community, marriages and family relationships are particular examples. And in very recent times we are witnessing breakdown in our financial and political systems.

I might also throw into the mix the political turmoil within the Church of England. Secular culture has also I believe led people to choose death instead of life. Euthanasia, abortion and suicide rates are all on the up and we live in a more violent society where the life of another is afforded less value.

So how do we find eternal life both as individuals and as a society? The Gospels are clear that it is not to be found in secular politics or in the generation of material wealth. Neither is it to be found in philosophical or religious formulae but only in a relationship with God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Steve