

The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life (8)
Eternal Life in the Kingdom of God
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Recapitulation

Brothers, sisters and friends, in the last several messages we have studied different aspects of the kingdom of God; I hope that the glory of the kingdom of God will attract you to pursue after it. Today we are going to look at one important topic: eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Introduction

Many years ago I met a Christian sister, she said that having eternal life is different from entering the kingdom of God, because the term “eternal life” and the term “kingdom of God” never appear together in the Bible! According to her reasoning, if you want to have eternal life, you only need to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then you can have it right now! But if you want to enter into the kingdom of God, you have to obey the commandments of the Lord Jesus, which are very difficult! She said that if you believe Jesus is the Son of God, you will receive eternal life right away; after that even if you don’t obey the Lord’s commandments, you won’t die, because you already have eternal life! Someone who has eternal life would not die, right? If you don’t obey the Lord’s commandments, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God, but it won’t affect your eternal life!

This teaching is dangerous; it can lead to very serious consequences in people’s lives because people would simply disregard the commandments of the Lord Jesus as well as the commandments in the Old Testament Law, they have nothing to fear anymore! Indeed there are whole groups of people who believe this teaching. Through all these years, the more I know about the Bible, the more I see the danger of this teaching. That’s why I decided to address this wrong teaching.

1. Eternal Life is in the kingdom of God

First of all eternal life and the kingdom of God are closely linked together according to the very words of the Lord Jesus.

^{NAU} **Luke 18:18 – 30**¹⁸ A ruler questioned Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.”²⁰ “You know the commandments, “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother.””²¹ And he said, “All these things I have kept from *my* youth.”²² When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, “One thing you

still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”²³ But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.²⁴ And Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!”²⁵ “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁶ They who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”²⁷ But He said, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.”²⁸ Peter said, “Behold, we have left our own *homes* and followed You.”²⁹ And He said to them, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,³⁰ who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”

In v.18 this man was asking the Lord Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life; the Lord told him to obey all the commandments; this man said he had kept all these commandments from his youth; the Lord then said, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. (If you want to understand the Lord’s teaching concerning money and wealth please refer to chapter 3 & 4 in the book “Totally Committed” by Pastor Eric Chang; you can read this book in the Christian Disciples Church’s website; if the Lord’s willing, in the future I will also talk about the Bible teaching on money and wealth.) Then in verses 24 & 25 the Lord Jesus said specifically that, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!”²⁵ “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Please take notice that this man asked about eternal life, but the Lord’s answer was about the requirement to enter into the kingdom of God. That shows that eternal life is in the kingdom of God, if you want to have eternal life, you have to enter into the kingdom of God!

That’s the first point, eternal life is in the kingdom of God.

2. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments

Now we look at the parallel passage of this same incident in the gospel of Matthew:

^{NAU} **Matthew 19:16 – 17**¹⁶ And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”¹⁷ And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Here the Lord Jesus said specifically that if you want to enter into life, you have to keep the commandments; that's the second point.

3. Eternal life is in the age to come

The third point is that eternal life is in the age to come. Indeed in the above passage Luke 18:29 – 30 the Lord Jesus said: “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,³⁰ who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life.”

Here the Lord said that eternal life is in the age to come. It is only in the age to come when we enter into the kingdom of God, we then have eternal life. It is not like some people think that if you just believe Jesus is the Son of God, then you can have eternal life right away!

Let's read one more passage concerning the eternal life in the age to come:

^{RSV} **Matthew 19:28 – 29** Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.²⁹ And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”

Here the Lord Jesus said that in the new world—that is, when the heaven and the earth both are renewed, and we will have a new heaven and a new earth—at that time the Son of man the Lord Jesus Christ will judge the twelve tribes of Israel; the twelve tribes of Israel means the people of God; At that time the Lord Jesus will judge the people of God, and all those who have left houses and land and family members for the Lord's sake will receive a hundredfold, and also inherit eternal life.

These two passages Luke 18:29 – 30 and Matthew 19:28 – 29 clearly show that those who have followed the Lord Jesus will receive eternal life in the age to come in the new heaven and the new earth. That's the third point.

Obedience to the Lord Jesus is part of our faith to him

But some people would say that John 3:16 clearly says that those who believe in the Son will have eternal life.

^{ESV} **John 3:16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This is the verse that many Christians like to quote, it seems so simple, that if you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life right now!

Let’s study this verse step by step. Most people don’t even know what believing in Jesus means! What does it mean to believe in Jesus? People don’t know! Most people think that believing in Jesus simply means believing that he is the Son of God! That sounds very easy!

In order to properly understand the meaning of John 3:16 , we need to look at the context, we don’t just read one verse only.

^{RSV} **John 3:36** He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

Some Bibles have “he who rejects the Son shall not see life” but the original Greek word *apeitheō* (*ἀπειθέω*), in every Greek-English dictionary means to disobey, not merely to reject.

Obedience to the Lord Jesus is part of our faith to him. If you truly believe in the Son then you would obey him. If you don’t obey the Son your faith to him is not genuine; the wrath of God would rest upon you, you won’t see life, that means you would perish!

Apostle John’s concept of eternal life

Some people will say that it’s true we have to obey the Lord Jesus, but according to John 3:16 we can have eternal life right now, not in the future, then on the other hand in Luke 18:30 the Lord Jesus said specifically eternal life is in the age to come. How do we reconcile this? In order to understand this, we have to understand apostle John’s concept of eternal life. What is his concept of eternal life?

Eternal life is the life in the Son of God

^{NAU} **1 John 5:11 – 12** And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Apostle John says specifically that eternal life is the life in the Son, that means if you live in the Son of God right now, then you are living in eternal life.

But when do we enter into the life of the Son of God? At baptism! It is at baptism that our life and the life of the Lord Jesus Christ are united as one.

^{NIV} **Romans 6:3 – 4** Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

It says here that at baptism we are baptized into the death of Christ Jesus, we die with him; then we are buried with him, then we are raised together with him into a new life. Please take notice these words: “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” It is at baptism that we enter into the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, with our lives and his life united as one.

We have to know that apostle John defines eternal life as the life in the Son of God, it doesn't mean that he is teaching something different from the Lord Jesus' teaching. No, no, he would never do that! But rather he sees that the life in the Son of God is so wonderful that it is eternal life to him!

Because John defines eternal life as the life in the Son of God, so if you believe and obey the Son of God, and you get baptized, then you have your life in him, and you have eternal life right now. But the important point is that after you have eternal life, you can't just leave the Lord! No, you have to continue to live in the Son of God, if you stop living in the Lord, then you won't have eternal life.

Do you experience the life in the Lord Jesus Christ right now?

The immediate question to Christians is whether right now you are experiencing the life in the Lord Jesus? Because eternal life is the life in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you don't experience the life in the Lord, then you don't have eternal life. If you don't have eternal life right now, then you won't have it in the future either!

I can share my testimony: By nature I am not eloquent, I cannot clearly express my thoughts, I don't like to talk, all the more I don't know how to debate with people. When I was studying in Vietnam, I didn't want to talk in class. When my teachers asked the class a question, I would never answer even though I knew the answer; that made my teachers very angry, quite often they had to point to me directly, “You answer!”

When I got baptized at Ottawa Bible Church, one week later, according to the practice of the church, all those who got baptized had to give a testimony at the pulpit. At that time my English was not enough to give the testimony in English, I wrote down every word in Chinese, the pastor assigned a sister to translate for me. Her English is very good, she is the best translator I have seen so far. When I was walking up to the pulpit, my legs and my hands were shaking; but I didn't stop, I walked up to the pulpit and I began to speak. Once I opened my mouth, I felt something like a whole bucket of water pouring down on my head and my body, and all of a sudden the fear was gone, I carefully read every word I had written down. From that moment on I was changed, the change started at that moment. Today I enjoy speaking the word of God; I use the word "enjoy", for speaking the word of God is an enjoyment to me. Every time I speak the word of God, I have this overwhelming joy filling my whole being, and this overwhelming joy can last for a few hours until evening, then it gradually quiets down. Today I am still not eloquent, I can only speak clearly when I speak the word of God, when I don't speak the word of God, no matter what language I speak, I still stumble a lot, I cannot debate or argue with people. But when I speak the word of God, I am transformed entirely. I thank my Father in heaven and my Lord Jesus Christ for the wonderful transformation in me, by this I know my life is in the Son of God the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is eternal life according to apostle John!

Conclusion

Now we sum up everything we have learned today, we see that:

- Eternal life is in the kingdom of God, if you are not in the kingdom of God, you don't have eternal life;
- Eternal life is linked with obeying the commandments of God; If you want to have eternal life, keep the commandments;
- Eternal life in its full and final sense is in the age to come, not at the present age.

Many people like to quote John 3:16 to say that if we just believe in Jesus Christ, we would have eternal life right away. But according to John 3:36 if you truly believe in Jesus Christ, you would obey him; if you don't obey him, your faith to him is not genuine, therefore you don't have eternal life.

Apostle John also defines eternal life as the life in the Son of God; if you live in the Son of God right now, you have eternal life; but if you stop living in the Son of God, you won't have eternal life.

Eternal Life in the Kingdom of God

Actually if you live your life in the Son of God, it is truly eternal life on earth right now, it is a foretaste of the eternal life in heaven in the future! Next time we will start looking at this eternal life on earth!