

Voices: Living abundantly now: The life of the age to come

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“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in him might have eternal life” (John 3:16)

Those of us who grew up in the church probably can recite that verse from heart. After all, it’s the most famous Bible verse in the world, and with good reason.

Who wouldn’t want to live forever? Who isn’t filled with boundless hope and uncontainable excitement at the prospect of an eternity in paradise?

How strange, then, that so many of us have missed a crucial truth revealed in the phrase “eternal life.” It’s such a rich phrase, abounding in promise and meaning, so much so it’s difficult to convey all of it properly through our English translations.

“Eternal life” plainly spells out the quantity of the life we will share with Christ. It is endless, immeasurable, infinite. But it fails to communicate the quality of that life properly. There is a better phrase: “life of the age to come.”

Admittedly, “life of the age to come” is a more ambiguous phrase, but once we understand the full weight of the story God has woven behind it, the beauty of what it promises us becomes, not only readily apparent, but a source of unconquerable joy.

In the midst of COVID-19, we could all use such joy, to feel not only joyful but unconquerable in the firm grasp of the God of the universe.

The joy of the gospel in John 3:16

The story of the gospel articulated so wonderfully in John 3:16 is that God has come into our world to redeem it to the uttermost. He has come into the world to redeem each of us to the uttermost.

God is not distant, not some callous king sitting on a throne far away from the messiness and ignobility of our affairs. In sending his Son, God came into the world to walk amongst us in the form of a man. He sent the clear message that this fragile, sin-tarnished human form could be made new, that it could be made holy and perfect.

God's intention is not to dip his hand into our world to scoop out the righteous before setting what remains ablaze and writing the whole venture off as a loss. God values his creation far too much for that. He intends to set it all right, to redeem us.

God is not working to bring us to heaven. He is in the process of bringing heaven down to us. Note: He already is in that process and has been from the moment an unassuming babe breathed divine breath out into the brisk Bethlehem night. Every day, God brings to us bits and pieces of heaven. Every day, he gives us glimpses of the life of the age to come.

Abundant life

Jesus declared in John 10:10 that he came "so [we] may have life, and have it in all its fullness." Our tongues taste the slightest hint of that life when we brush against the divine in the mundane of our lives.

Life is a gift from God. God only gives good gifts, blessings tinged with all the goodness inherent in his character, and no gift is given without the intention of the recipient enjoying it to the fullest. Life is no exception. It is a gift meant to be experienced fully and reveled in as God has intended so

we might enjoy him.

When the Bible speaks of eternal life, it speaks not just of infinitely long life but infinitely good life. We're not quite to the full extent of that yet, as evidenced by the disease and fear ravaging our world as I write this, but that doesn't mean we have been deprived of all of it. There are still pockets of the abundant life God is leading us toward in every corner of our lives, if we keep our eyes open for them.

Despite how it may feel in the gloom of isolation, the world still is spinning. Life still goes on, different though it may be. Life still is bursting at the seams with the glory and goodness of God.

Our cups still overflow with his mercy and grace, because the gospel doesn't just promise us life after death. It promises us life before death.

Take hold of that life today and live it, mysterious though it may be, because it still is beautiful, and by the grace of God, it still is here. You are still here, and that always is cause for praise and celebration.

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