

John 3:14-21 (NRSV)

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Eternal Life in God

What is death? This question isn't from some philosopher but from me. It's a question that has emerged from my very own experience. When I was about 15 years old, my uncle passed away in a tragic accident. It happened when it was still too young to talk about death, and I experienced the pain of the families around me.

I didn't like my uncle(father's side) very much. He was a very unfriendly person. He was not kind to me. He was arrogant. And he was such an authoritarian that I didn't like him. But losing him broke my whole family's heart. Not only for the families and relatives. It brought my heart too. It was not because he was my favorite relative. I was not ready to leave him and did not have a chance to forgive him. That's when I realized something. I asked myself, how much more would it hurt if I lost someone I liked?

After that, I start thinking about death. I've read some articles, books, and heard stories about death and the afterlife. But, while I listened, I did not really understand. It is because the world of death is not a place we can go to. It's not a place like Canada, Mexico, South Korea, or any other country where you can go many times and learn about. I visited Niagara Falls twice and Iguazu Falls many times. But, the afterlife is not someplace like Niagara Falls. The afterlife is also not a place where we can go and do research.

It's just that death, as experienced while living in the present world, seems to be a "disconnect," a disconnection from the present world. Therefore, none of us as human beings can be sure or certain about death and life after death.

We often hear stories of people who have experienced the mysteries of the afterlife or who have briefly experienced the afterlife through ancient or medieval sources. I read a book by an American called "Heaven as I Saw It." However, I found it difficult to accept all of their words or beliefs as I'm a skeptical person.

Suddenly, when I thought that life after death was beyond human comprehension, I began to see the Bible from a new perspective. Because of the word "eternal life."

It was John 3:16 that comforted me as a teenager when I had a horror and fear of death.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

The word eternal life (αἰώνιος ζωή (aiōnios zōē)) appears most often in the Gospel of John. It appears 17 times. The explanation of eternal life is very prevalent in John's gospel (we should be thankful for John's gospel because in Friday's Bible study, we asked the question, "If it weren't for John's gospel...").

And the first description of that eternal life begins in John 3:16, our reading today.

The Gospel of John uses the word "eternal life" to tell us that the world we live in and the world after death are connected through God, and that eternal life is given through Jesus. Isn't that interesting?

We don't know what happens in the afterlife, but we can understand this text to mean that we should have no fear of death because we have eternal life in God based on our faith and belief in the word of Jesus Christ.

I decided to take a more realistic approach by thinking about the biblical story and the words "eternal life."

We don't know what happens in the afterlife, but I wonder if the people who met Jesus had a little taste of eternal life. Did they? If Jesus is the eternal life, then people might have experienced that evidence in the Bible, especially in the gospels. So, who experienced or pre-taste that eternal life in Jesus?

The sick did; the women did; the uneducated did; the poor did. The same goes for the disciples. They're people with nothing going for them from the world's perspective, and then they meet Jesus and their lives change. They get healed. Their identity is restored. They become something from nothing (They were not considered as the children of God. But, Jesus restored them.) The world and authorities may have continued to judge them as sinners and powerless, but that judgment doesn't dampen the joy of their encounter with Jesus. They may have continued to be homeless, orphans, and widows in their day, but they have the joy of eternal life. A life with God forever.

We can also look at eternal life from this point of view. If God is with us after death, isn't that eternal life? In other words, death is not the end of our lives, but God is the beginning and end of our lives, and I believe this is what gives us hope.

If God is at the end of our life, then what do we have to fear?

There is pain. There is sickness. There are hardships and difficulties, and that's okay, because at the end of it all, God is with us.

The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus was with God from the beginning of the world and that he rose from the dead. This means that Jesus is the story of God who is beyond our beginnings and endings, a story that fully reveals God.

This is why the first-century Christians were so bold: they had nothing to prove to the world, but they believed that there was a God at the beginning and the end of their lives and that God had given them eternal life through Jesus. And they teach us about that faith. Even though there is death, there is God beyond death.

So, my dear friends, what makes you afraid?

Please remember that fear is a very natural human experience in those very human moments when we experience fear of the unknown, of the very human experience of death.

But, let's not forget, it's not the end of the story.

Even our greatest fear, death, is not the end.

God is at the end of our lives.

Jesus, who defeated death, has already proven it.

If we believe this, then living today with Jesus is also "eternal life." Eternal life is not just life after death; it's a gift for you and me today.

May this be a word of comfort to us and a word of comfort to all.

At the same time, may it be a word of hope for you.

If the end of our lives is with God, then that will be true eternal life for you and me today. Let us pray.

God, thank you that we have come to know Jesus, who gives us eternal life.

Dear God, thank You for Your assurance that death is not the end of our lives.

Help us to live today, not in the fear of death, but in the knowledge that you are not only the source of life on this earth but also the giver of an eternal life with You once our time here on earth is done. Thank you, God, for you are the end of us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.