

John 10:10

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[0 : 00] It's that time of year again. For those of you who are wondering, well, what time of year would that be? Well, it's the start of another academic year and the annual arrival here in the city of thousands of bright young things thirsty for knowledge. Well, I think it's knowledge that they're thirsty for. And some of you are here this morning and welcome, very especially if you are beginning your studies in Aberdeen this year for the first time. And as I pondered what might be suitable themes for such an occasion, the thought of addressing some of the big questions emerged.

And from the dark recesses of my mind, a wee phrase impressed itself upon me. Life, the universe, and everything. Life, the universe, and everything. Now, we can safely say that these all qualify as big themes. For the uninitiated, the phrase is the title of one of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy books by Douglas Adams. Now, I really wish that I could have begun with a slightly more contemporary reference to popular culture, but that's not going to happen. Sadly, I am stuck in the 80s, and you're just going to have to take me as I am. So, that's really the best I can do, the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxies. But that phrase that is the title of one of the books is really what was going around, milling around my mind. Life, the universe, and everything.

And I reckon that I could get three sermons out of that. Go on, work it out. How do I get three sermons out of that? Well, that's right, life, the universe, and everything. And this is day one, so we're going to start with life. We begin with life. What is life all about? What is life, period? When my sons tell me to get a life, where exactly am I to find such a thing? Jesus Christ is big on life. Life is a recurring theme in His teaching and conversation with His disciples and indeed with others. On one occasion in particular, He uses very evocative and appealing language in describing the purpose of His coming, the purpose of His mission. We've read the words in John's gospel in chapter 10 and verse 10, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Life to the full. I wonder if that sounds good to you. Does that sound appealing to you? Does it sound attractive to you that you would live life to the full? But what does it mean? It's not a reference solely to physical life very evidently as Jesus is talking about those who already enjoy or experience physical life or existence. Jesus, in the words that He uses and in the mission that He identifies for Himself, is really responding to the ever-present, though often suppressed, concern that lurks in the human consciousness. There must be more to life than this, more than just being hatched, matched, and dispatched, more than eating and drinking, studying and working, playing and procreating.

[3 : 47] Jesus claims that He is able to transform life from existence or mere existence, if you wish, to what He calls life to the full. Now, the language that Jesus normally uses to speak of this life to the full is the language of eternal life. This would be the phrase, if you wish, that He would normally use. And eternal life or life to the full are, in effect, two ways of describing the same reality.

But what is it? What is this reality of life to the full or eternal life? Well, this morning we're going to consider one occasion where Jesus, very helpfully, gives us a definition of eternal life.

And I invite you to turn to John's Gospel, another passage in John's Gospel, in chapter 17. We're going to read there the first three verses of John chapter 17. It's on page 1085 in the church Bible. We're going to discover in these verses how Jesus grants to us, He gives us, He provides for us what we could call a definition of eternal life, of life to the full. What is it all about? What does it involve? So, let's read in John chapter 17 from the beginning. It's worth noticing that on this occasion, Jesus is praying to His Father. It is as He anticipates His own death on Calvary's tree. He is about to give His life as a sacrifice for sinners, and He is praying to His Father. And listen in on what He says. After Jesus said this, He looked towards heaven and prayed, Father, the time has come.

Glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted Him authority over all people, that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

[6 : 21] There are three questions that we can answer by reference to what Jesus says in this passage, in this prayer to the Father. Three questions, and I'll mention what they are, and then we can consider them or seek to answer them from the text one by one. First of all, what is the source of eternal life, of life to the full? What is the source of such life? But also, what is the nature of eternal life? What is the nature of life to the full? What's it like? And then finally, what must I do, what must you do to experience eternal life? Three questions that are answered, in some measure, in these words that Jesus addresses to His Father. First of all then, what is the source of eternal life? And the key word in answering this question is the word gift.

Three gifts, in actual fact, that are made reference to in these verses. And we're just going to mention them or notice them very fleetingly. The first gift that is mentioned is the Father's gift of a people to His Son. God the Father gives His Son, Jesus, the gift of a people. Notice there in verse 2, for you granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him. All those you, the Father, have given Him, or me, Jesus. So, there is this gift that Jesus makes reference to as He embarks on, as He makes reference to this theme of eternal life, this gift of the Father to the Son, the gift of a people, a very special gift, the gift of men and women, of boys and girls. So, this is one gift to be aware of as we consider this matter of the source of eternal life. But there's another gift that is alluded to in this passage, and that is the Father's gift of authority to His Son. Notice again there in verse 2, for you granted Him authority. You granted Him, you gave Him, you gifted Him authority. This is the second gift that is relevant in answering the question. What is the source of eternal life? The giving of authority from the Father to the Son. And this gift, this second gift, if you wish, leads on necessarily and immediately to the third gift, and that is the Son's gift of eternal life to His people. Again, that is what is said there in verse 2, The Son is granted authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him. This is the reason why authority is granted by the Father to the Son, that He might give eternal life, life to the full, to His own people. So, in answer to the question, what is the source of eternal life? Of life to the full? If you are drawn to such a life, if that's the kind of life you want to live, life to the full, then this is the source of such life. Its source is in God Himself. Its source is in the triune God's eternal purposes. Its source is in the eternally present love in the Godhead that finds expression in the giving and receiving of gifts. Its source is in God. Eternal life is a gift that God and only God can give. So, if you're going to look for life to the full anywhere else, I can prophesy something for you. You will fail. You won't find it. You can search and you can look and you can do so for a lifetime, but you won't find it, for the only source of eternal life, of life to the full, is in God Himself.

[10 : 40] It is a gift that only God can give. But there's a second question that we want to notice, and that is, what is the nature of eternal life? What is it? Well, verse 3 that we've read is practically a dictionary definition. Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. What is life? What is eternal life? To know God. To know God. Simple. But maybe not quite so simple. We need to further explore what Jesus says, and we can do this by asking two questions.

Who is the God that we are to know, and what is the knowledge like? What characteristics are there to this knowledge? Eternal life is to know God very well, but who is this God, and what is this knowledge that we are to experience in knowing God? First of all, then, who is this God we are to know?

Well, Jesus tells us, eternal life is that they may know you, the only true God. The you refers to the Father. Jesus is praying to the Father, and He says, eternal life is to know you, Father. That's what eternal life is. That they would know you, that the disciples, that men and women, that boys and girls would know you.

That's what eternal life is. It is to know God, the eternal Father, God who is and who reveals Himself as Father. And He is further described by Jesus as the only true God. This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God.

God. The God who is Father is not, according to Jesus, one of many in a pantheon of divinities. He's not even the preeminent God sitting proudly atop the premiership table of divinities. No. Jesus says that He is the only true God. Eternal life is knowing this God and none other, for there is none

other.

[13:04] This is the God that we must know if we are to enjoy and experience eternal life. Indeed, eternal life is knowing this God. But Jesus doesn't stop there. There is an and. Notice there in verse 3, this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God. He doesn't stop there. He continues, and, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. This is, and no doubt would have been considered by many, a very outrageous claim that has been made by Jesus, that Jesus would say to the disciples that life to the full, eternal life is to know God, is maybe a reasonable thing to say. And they might reasonably have been able to, to understand that, or at least, even if they didn't understand it, fully say, well, yes, that, I can, I can buy into that. But He says, not only is it to know God, the only true God, but also to know Him. Jesus affirms that eternal life also involves, indeed, requires knowing Himself, knowing

Jesus. Now, we have to maybe take a quick step back here and just ponder or just pose a question. Is Jesus saying that eternal life involves, in parallel, if you wish, or involves two elements, connected but, but separate? One is to know the Father. Okay, so eternal life is knowing the Father, fair enough. But eternal life also is knowing the Son, it's knowing Jesus. So these two aspects, if you wish, in parallel together, make up what is eternal life. Well, I don't think that is what Jesus is saying at all. Rather, that is an implicit recognition in what Jesus says that to know God is not possible without knowing Jesus. It's almost as if Jesus is anticipating a reasonable question, a question that somebody could pose if they were to be told, eternal life is to know God.

And somebody who is genuinely concerned and interested in the matter could retort, well, you say that eternal life is to know God. But how can I know God? How am I to know God?

Yes, I want eternal life. I want life to the full. You're telling me that it's about knowing God. But how can I know God? How can I know God? And Jesus replies. He replied then and He replies now. He replies this morning, He says, through me. Through me. That is why my Father sent me to make Himself known. Jesus is the way to know God. He is the way. He is the only way to know God.

[16:08] To know Jesus is to know God. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas. Thomas was concerned to see the Father.

Show me the Father. And Jesus said these words to him, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Or the words that immediately preceded that claim. When Jesus informed His disciples of this great truth, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Or the words of the writer to the Hebrews at the very beginning of his letter. The Son, Jesus, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being.

And how is it that Jesus serves this purpose of bringing us to know God? Well, He was sent by the Father not just to reveal God, though that was central to His purpose, but also to act as a mediator or bridge between God and man.

The very prayer of Jesus addressed to His Father on this occasion is prayed on the very night that He was, to use His own language, that He was to be glorified in the giving of His own life in the place of sinners, in our place, to open up a way of access, of approach to God.

[17:46] So eternal life is to know God. The God we are to know is the only true God. And Jesus Christ, sent by God, is the one by and in whom we can come to know God and be reconciled to God. This is the God we are to know.

But in considering this matter of what is the nature of eternal life, there's a second element or a second question that I had anticipated, and it is this. What is this knowledge like? What characteristics are there to this knowledge, this knowing God, and knowing Him in Christ Jesus? Well, there's much that could be said, but I want to limit myself to two things this morning, and that is to say that this knowledge is personal knowledge. If you wish, we could call it relational knowledge.

To know God does involve, and indeed requires, knowing about God. But it goes beyond knowing about God to knowing God, to being, to use another expression, to being in a relationship with God. This is the repeated language of the Bible, of the gospel. The work of Jesus secures for us friendship with God. It secures for us adoption into God's family. It secures for us a place at the family table. What Jesus has done on our behalf is provided us this great opportunity to be in relationship with God, not simply to know a lot about Him, though that is important, but to be in relationship with Him, to become part of His family. So, this knowledge that is eternal life, that is life to the full, is personal, it's relational. But there's a second thing that I would say, and it very much follows on from the first, and that is this, that it is growing and deepening knowledge.

If to know God is personal or relational, as we are claiming, then it must also involve the need for a growing and a deepening relationship. Let us be very clear, we will never know God exhaustively. [20 : 11] Never. We will never know God exhaustively. We will always, even in eternity, be growing in our knowledge of God. In this life, in the here and now, as by faith in Jesus Christ, we are brought into friendship with God. We know Him truly. We know Him truly, but we don't know Him fully. Indeed, in this life, we are able to and must cultivate this relationship with God, and so grow in our knowledge of God. So, eternal life is to know God. But let us be clear that it's not a one-off transaction, that in one fine day God gives us eternal life, and that's it. We know Him, and there's nothing more to be done. No. It is the beginning of a life where this knowledge of God is to grow and to deepen in our working for Him and in relating to Him. Well, let's bring this back to the matter of eternal life. Eternal life is to know God. Life to the full is to know God. If knowing God involves growth and increasing depth, then it follows that our experience of life to the full, our experience of eternal life, will be directly proportional to the growth in or deepening of our relationship with God in Jesus

Christ. What is the source of eternal life? What is the nature of eternal life? What does it involve? What is it like? But there's a third question that we want to pose and briefly answer, and it is this. What must I do to experience eternal life? What must you do to experience eternal life? Well, there are two things to say that follow on necessarily from what has gone before. Firstly, this. If eternal life is a gift, as Jesus states very plainly on this occasion, if eternal life is a gift, then it has to be received. It has to be received. It has to be received. That is what you do with a gift. You receive a gift.

Eternal life can't be bought. It can't be earned. It can't be deserved. It can't be procured by means fair or foul. None of these ways. It is a gift that can be received, that must be received.

And how do you receive this gift? Well, that takes us to what is possibly the most well-known and familiar verse in the whole Bible. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. How are we to receive eternal life?

[23 : 14] By believing in Jesus. By trusting in Jesus, the one sent by the Father. By trusting in him as our Savior and Lord. We receive by believing. We receive by faith. We receive by trusting in the one sent by the Father. By trusting in Jesus. And this morning I have a question for you. Is that something that you have done? Is that something perhaps more importantly that you are doing? Are you trusting in Jesus, the one sent by God to be your Savior? Are you trusting in him as your Savior, as your Lord?

Have you recognized your need of him? Have you come to recognize that the only way you can experience and enjoy eternal life is by trusting in the one provided for you? Trusting in Jesus. Have you? Will you?

What must you do to experience eternal life? Well, you have to receive the gift that is offered to you. But there's a second element. If eternal life involves knowing God or being in a relationship with God, and so, as we've contended, involves growth and increasing depth, then we must cultivate our relationship with God. If we are to experience and enjoy eternal life or life to the full. Yes, we must receive the gift that is offered. But having received, there is still much to be done. We have received it. We have eternal life in the here and now. Not some future prospect now, but that eternal life. That Jesus describes as knowing God must be cultivated by us. You see, this is where the great disconnect between the grand words of Jesus is. And they are grand words. But the disconnect between the grand words of Jesus and our own day-to-day reality, so often, is to be explained. As Christians, is it not the case that we often look at ourselves, and indeed others look at us? And the sobering of God is not the same. But honest conclusion is often that this life to the full that Jesus speaks of is far from being our experience. And we say, well, why is this? The language is so grand. It sounds so exciting. It sounds, that's the kind of life I want to live, but it's not the life I'm living. Why is that? Well, is it not often the case? It's because we fail to cultivate our relationship with God. If eternal life is knowing God. And if knowing God must involve growth and deepening and developing, if we fail to do that, then it's not surprising that we do not enjoy and experience eternal life in the measure that is intended. We don't lose our relationship with God, but we don't enjoy it. We don't experience it as He would wish us to. So, what must you do? What must you do to experience eternal life? Well, receive the gift that is offered to you, but having received, cultivate that gift.

[26 : 45] Dedicate your life to that. Those of you who are beginning on a new chapter in your lives, and it's very exciting. And you have a discipline you're going to study, hopefully something that you enjoy and you're excited about, and you're going to dedicate yourself to that, and that's good.

But in the midst of all that, remember that there can be no higher a calling, no more noble venture, no more exciting adventure, no more satisfying vocation than to know God in and through Jesus Christ.

Nothing, nothing matches that knowledge that Jesus describes as eternal life, life to the full.

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is truly no greater thing. Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Next Sunday, the universe. Let's pray.