

1 Timothy 6:11-16

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Date: 06 March 2011

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[0 : 0 0] Last week, we began to look at God's character a bit, to look particularly at God's otherness, what makes God unique, different than us.

Hopefully we can expand our faith as we expand our understanding of God's character. So last week in the evening, we began to think about God's eternal nature.

God is not bound by time as we are. God knows all things perfectly instantaneously. And perhaps because He is not bound by time, He can contemplate us and our prayers, our situations, our past, our present, our future, all of these things in a moment, or what seems to us like a moment.

God knows us through and through, and He can do all things, partly because He is eternal. Peter says, and this was last week, Peter says, Do not forget this one thing, dear friends.

With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. Do not forget that. That was last week. This week, or this morning, we're going to focus on a different aspect of God's character.

[1 : 2 4] His immortality. God is immortal. Deathless. He lives. Now, God's eternal nature is a bit more complicated, a bit more challenging to think about, because we, as creatures, as humans, we can't fully get outside of time.

We can't get outside of time to contemplate God that way. His immortality, however, is a bit easier to understand, as hopefully you'll find this morning, because it involves death.

And death is something that all of us know very well. Some know better than others. Scripture describes death as an enemy.

It describes death as a shroud that enfolds all people, as a sheet that covers all nations. That's in Isaiah 25.

That's death. And all of us, actually, even people who don't believe the Bible and other things, probably everybody who lives can understand the truth behind those descriptions.

[2 : 3 7] Death is a shroud that covers everyone. An enemy. Death is very, very real. And we like to contemplate death's absence.

And that's what we're going to do for a bit this morning. Contemplate the absence of death, as it is in God. In God alone, actually. Now, humanity, all of us, I think we quest after life, after immortality, after a feeling of being alive.

We quest after that more passionately than we realize. And we do it in small ways, not just the big ways, developing science that will take away human death, but subtle ways.

We look for life. Think about, in our culture, in the Western culture in particular, think about what it defines as love, and constantly questing after love, which usually just means sexual excitement.

A feeling of being alive and invigorated. And when that dies, you look for it elsewhere. This is a quest to feel alive.

- [3 : 52] Not just sexually, but relationships in general. Some of you might have met a person, or more than one person, who you'd describe them as making you feel alive.
- That's who they are. And we really grasp on to people like that, who make us feel alive. And when something goes wrong, we grasp after the next one, who does that to us.
- You can think of adrenaline junkies. There are plenty of people. Most of us might be this way to some extent, but the extreme adrenaline junkies, who go from exciting thing to exciting thing, trying to feel invigorated inside, full of life.
- And soon, that excitement, it doesn't work anymore. So they've got to up the ante, up at a notch, get more excited, try the next dangerous thing. I think all of these are in some way trying to feel more alive.
- We're addicted to it. But at the same time, we are hounded by death. It's always coming. In small ways and in a big way.
- [5 : 01] What does the Bible say about deathlessness? I'll make up a word here. Deathlessness. Complete life. Immortality.
- Well, the passage that Michael read for us talks about life. And it mentions immortality. Let me highlight a few phrases. So if you could look at the passage.
- One phrase in particular, we're going to contemplate the rest of this morning. Starting in verse 12, Paul tells Timothy, fight the good fight of the faith.
- And then he describes it in terms of life. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. Or in verse 13, in the sight of God, who gives life to everything.
- Or look further down. God, this is in verse 15, God, the blessed and only ruler, the king of kings, the lord of lords, who alone is immortal, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.
- [6 : 13] To him be honor and might forever. That last phrase in particular, or one of those last phrases, God, who alone is immortal, that's the one, the phrase I want us to think about for a little bit.
- And we're going to think about it in two ways, from two angles. First, we're going to think about what does that mean, God is immortal? We're going to explore that a little bit.
- And then we're going to ask the question, God alone? See, it says God alone is immortal. So what about humans? Are we not immortal?
- Do we not have some aspect of us that's immortal? So, first, God is immortal. Let's contemplate that for a little bit. When you turn in your Bible, the very first page, you don't need to do this, I'm going to speak in general terms, but when you turn to the very beginning, the first glimpse of God in the Bible, he is doing nothing other than creating life.
- This is what God does. He's the creator of life. Now, these are all going to be, again, different angles in how to understand God being himself immortal, without death, full of life and nothing else.
- [7 : 29] He's the creator of life. You can see that it just comes from him. This is what happens when God acts. There's life. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
- He created this watery globe. And I could ask you, do you think water is important for life? I'm sure some of you could answer better, a lot better than me.
- Water is incredibly important for life. And God starts there, yet it's dark. It's uninhabited, empty. It's uninhabitable. Nobody, nothing can live there.
- So what God does over the next six days of creation is he begins to make this watery globe inhabitable, able to contain life, and then he fills it with life.
- Let me run over what he does each of the days very quickly. In day one, and God said, and there was light. God speaks and light comes into the darkness.

[8 : 29] Day two, God said, he speaks again, and he makes that watery world suddenly inhabitable by fish and birds.

He creates the skies and the seas. He makes it ready to contain life. In day three, and God said, he speaks, and he makes the watery world inhabitable by land creatures.

He brings up solid land, preparing it for life. And then he brings up plants and fruit. He actually starts bringing life. Day four, and God said, he speaks, and there are the luminaries, the sun, the moon, the stars.

Day five, and God said, he speaks, and the water and the sky get filled with life, birds and fish. Day six, and God said again, and he made the solid land inhabited with life, beasts and humans.

So if you look at, if you step back and you look at Genesis one and everything that God does, everything when he speaks, you see this, when God speaks, he makes light, he makes place livable, he makes a place livable in a different way, he gives more light, and then he makes life, and then he makes more life.

[9 : 50] You can define it in terms of life and life. This is what he's doing. This is creation. Now that's just a quick glimpse at God the creator, and how when he starts to act, he himself is so full of life that life just happens.

Things get livable, and then life comes about. That's the creator of life. But the Bible doesn't stop there when it talks about God and life.

He's the sustainer of life too. God is not like a clock maker who just, he creates this nice clock and winds it up and then lets it go and never touches it again just to let it tick on its own.

The Bible doesn't describe God in that way. He continues to sustain life. So let me just read two verses from the Bible about this. In Job, we read, in God's hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

If it were his intention, he would, and he withdrew his spirit and his breath, all mankind would perish together, and man would return to the dust. Life is in God's hand continuously.

[11 : 02] That was in Job. In Acts, Paul is preaching to the Athenians, the Greeks, and Paul says, the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth.

And he does not live in temples made by hands. He's not served by human hands as if he needed anything because he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything else.

This is the Bible's understanding of God. He's the creator of life and he continues to sustain it all. So if you look around you, you see something that's alive.

Another human, or you go outside and you see an animal that's alive, you see plants, everything that's alive owes that to God. Now this is probably obvious to most people in here.

This is not new, but that doesn't mean it's not good. God is the giver of life. And this is what Paul means in our passage in 1 Timothy. Did you see in verse 13?

[12 : 12] He charges Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith in the sight of God who gives life to everything. That's what he's talking about. Not eternal life, but God is the creator of life and he sustains it.

God is the one who gives life to everything. Jesus said this in a slightly more robust way, a slightly fuller way.

Jesus says of his father, now remember, Jesus is the one unique son of God. If anybody knows God, Jesus knows God. He says of his father, the father has life within himself.

He says that in John 5. The father has life within himself. Now we're getting closer to what God being immortal means. He doesn't just give life.

All life does not simply owe its existence to him, but he himself simply has life. There's no death in God. It's a foreign thing to God. He has life within himself.

[13 : 23] God is living in the fullest possible sense we can think of. And that leads us to the very next statement that the Bible loves to make about God.

One title that appears over and over and over about God all throughout Scripture is he is the living God. This is an exciting and a scary thing.

To fall into the hands of the living God. In Psalm 42, for example, I could give you any number of examples of this if you're interested. I actually have the references, but there's way too many to read.

I'll read you two. Psalm 42 says, as the deer pants for streams of water. My soul pants for you, O Lord.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? The living God. Or in Acts, again, Paul is speaking to people and he says, we bring you good news, telling you to turn away from those worthless things and turn to the living God who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

[14 : 36] That's the living God. So what better way is there to describe this God, the creator of life, the sustainer of all things living, the one who has life in himself, the living God, than to simply say he's immortal.

He has no death, no mortality. So that's, and that's exactly what Paul says, isn't it? God is immortal.

Though like I mentioned at the beginning, Paul doesn't just say that God is immortal. He says, God alone is immortal. So this leads us on to our second, our question.

We've just looked at God being immortal and some of what that means. But God alone, what about humans? What about our souls or our spirits?

Whatever that immaterial and invisible aspect to us is, doesn't it last forever? And doesn't that mean it's immortal? Or what about at creation?

[15 : 55] Now we know that we sin now, that we humans have brought death into the world. But what about before that? Adam and Eve, before they sinned, were they immortal?

Those two questions are going to be how we explore this for a few moments. Our souls, our spirits, aren't they immortal? Well, we need to be careful here because I think the answer is no.

Yet, our souls do last forever. They endure forever. That's something the Bible says over and over again or it shows us in pictures talking about the souls of people, of all people, whether they believe in Christ or they reject Christ, all people, their souls, will be consciously present forever.

But that does not mean they're immortal, deathless. Let me read you one verse, or well, one passage in 2 Thessalonians that talks about the negative side of this.

Talks about people who reject Christ. This is in 2 Thessalonians 1 verses 6 to 10. Excuse me.

[17 : 09] God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well. Now let me pause for a second and just make an aside.

When God pays back people who trouble us, we love calling him a just God like Paul does here. God is just. When God is going to pay us back for when we trouble other people, that's usually when we forget about justice and we say, how could a loving God do something like that?

So that's just to keep in mind. God is just. He will pay back trouble to those troubling you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well.

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire and with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They will be punished with an everlasting destruction and they will be shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. on the day that he comes to be glorified in his holy people.

[18 : 32] To be marveled at among all those who have believed. And this includes you because you have believed our testimony. This is not a pretty picture.

But these people who reject Christ are in a place away from the Lord's presence it says. And they are there for a given time. Everlasting.

Our souls are everlasting always there but that doesn't mean they're immortal. Nobody could define this state of being as without death even though it lasts forever.

It's not deathless. So our souls are not by nature immortal even though they are by nature everlasting. What about Adam at creation?

And the importance of these two questions will come clear after this. But what about Adam? Wasn't he and Eve weren't they created immortal and then lost that when they sinned and brought death in?

[19 : 41] And again the answer is no. God did not create Adam and Eve immortal. Let me read you a few verses in Genesis.

So you can certainly turn there if you want but I'll be reading them fairly quickly. In Genesis 2 God creates Adam. The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living soul a living being.

But that does not mean that he was immortal and this is what I mean by that. In chapter 3 after that Adam has sinned rebelled against God rejected God as king and has brought death into the world after that the Lord looks at him and says perhaps to the Lord's hosts of angels surrounding him or maybe just within his triune self it's hard to know but the Lord says about Adam in Genesis 3 the man has now become like one of us knowing good and evil he must not be allowed to reach out his hands and touch and take from the tree of life and live forever.

So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. After he drove the man out he placed on the east side of the garden of Eden a cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Did you catch that? Small detail. Adam has to reach out and take from the tree of life to become immortal to live forever. As he was created in and of himself even before sin he wasn't going to live forever unless he were to eat of something from outside of himself.

[21 : 38] he had to take something receive something from God to become immortal. God didn't create him that way. Now what what does this matter?

Why does it matter that Adam even before sin was not immortal? And why does it matter that our souls although they last forever are not immortal by nature?

Why does that matter? Well the point is this humans us we are not in no aspect of us we are not and have never been immortal except when the one immortal one God himself gives us a gift.

Even Adam in sinless perfection needed God to give him life eternal life. He didn't have it on his own. We've always been desperate for God reliant only on God who is the one immortal being.

That's the point of this. We have no reason to look to ourselves our society loves doing that. We have no reason to look to humanity or even to our past even to our perfection in the past to look for immortality there.

[22 : 58] It's always been only by God who is alone immortal which is exactly why Paul says God alone is immortal.

Only God is deathless. Now that that's quite something because of some statements that Jesus makes about himself and life and this is what I want to draw us to a close with.

It'll take a few moments. We're not 30 seconds away from closing. I'm going to read a number of passages and then we'll close. We're going to contemplate Jesus for a few minutes. Because we've left off with the question of the gift of immortality.

God alone is full of life without death immortal but he has the right to give that as a gift. And we're going to see we're going to focus on Jesus for a few minutes because Jesus says some incredibly important things about life about deathlessness.

To do this I'm going to read passages from the gospel of John. This is one theme that John loves is Jesus and life. You see John begins his gospel not with Jesus' birth in human form but he begins it a long time before that in creation.

[24 : 30] See if you recognize some of the things that were mentioned a moment ago when we thought about creation. See if you recognize the life and light. John begins his gospel in this way.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Through him all things were made.

without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it.

But we know that that word of God who has life within himself took on flesh and dwelled with humans. So now we pick up Jesus' story when he's a human.

What does Jesus himself say about life? I'm going to read you a number of passages simply work our way through some key statements in John's gospel from Jesus' mouth.

[25 : 37] Listen for these themes of life. God loved the world in this way that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life for God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only son this is the verdict light has come into the world but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil the father loves the son and has placed everything in his hands whoever believes in the son has eternal life but whoever rejects the son will not see life for

God's wrath remains on him the woman of Samaria says are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself as did his sons and flocks and herds Jesus answered everyone who drinks from this water will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water that I give him will never be thirsty indeed the water I give him will become within him a spring of water welling up to eternal life just as the father raises the dead and gives them life even so the son gives life to whomever he is pleased to give it whomever or sorry moreover the father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the son that all may honor the son just as they honor the father he who does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him i tell you the truth whoever hears my word and believes me and believes him who sent me he has eternal life and will not be condemned he has crossed over from death to life i tell you the truth a time is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the son of

God and those who hear will live as the father has within himself life so also he has granted to the son to have life within himself the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world sir they said give us this bread now Jesus declared I am the bread of life he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never thirst for my father's will is that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up in the last day just as the children also listened to this story this morning listen to what Jesus said to Martha she said Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died but I do know that even

God will give you whatever you ask Jesus said to her your brother will live again Martha answered I know he will rise again from the dead on the resurrection at the last day Jesus said to her I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me even though he dies he will live and the one who believes in me and lives he will never die do not let your hearts be troubled Jesus says trust in God trust also in me in my father's house are many rooms if it were not so I would have told you I am going to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will certainly come back and take you to be with me where I am you know the way to the place that I am going Thomas said Lord we don't know where you're going how do we know the way and

Jesus answered I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me now all those instances and I skipped out on some but all those instances throughout the gospel of John where Jesus is claiming to have life and to be the one the only one who can actually give that to other people who can take away death give immortality John finishes his gospel or toward the end of his gospel John summarizes by saying this Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and that by believing you might have life in his name have you ever wondered why

[31 : 17] Jesus doesn't say I give resurrection and I make alive why he says I am the resurrection I am the life well perhaps a glimmer of what Jesus meant by that is in the fact that yes he does grant life to us to those who believe but it's not like a present that we can take and go somewhere else and enjoy go about being immortal it's him he is the life we have to be with him always we have to live all of our lives in connection in union with him he is the life he is the resurrection he doesn't simply hand it out for us to go about our business with now listen to this one last statement of Jesus and then I'll close with two passages about immortality listen to this last statement of

Jesus recorded by John in Revelation Jesus says I am the living one I was dead but look I'm alive forever and ever and I hold the keys to death and Hades that's Jesus so remember fight the good fight of the faith take hold of eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession before many witnesses in the sight of God who gives life to all things and in the sight of Christ Jesus who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made a good confession I charge you to keep this command to fight the good fight keep it without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ and with this passage I leave you at the return of Jesus when he comes back the following will happen to those who trust him in 1st

Corinthians 15 we will not all sleep but we will all be changed in the flash in a twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed for the perishable must clothe itself with imperishability and the mortal with immortality when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal been clothed in immortality then the saying that was written in Isaiah will come true death has been swallowed up in victory move move you always give yourselves fully to the work of the

Lord because you know that your labor in him is not in vain let's pray Do do make her troops with a water bay