

Eternal Life

There are many places within the New Testament that assure Christians of having eternal life. One of those is found in 1 John 2:17 where we read; **The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:17 NASB)**

We may recall the difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was that the Sadducees did not believe in any after life. It may lead us to ask if there is any mention of life after death, resurrection, or reward for those who observed the Law of Moses? The answer is both yes and no. In the “Books of Law” or the Pentateuch, there is no mention of eternal life. When we look at the first five books of the Old Testament, we find the history of one family growing into a nation. They receive certain laws which we have come to know as Mosaic Laws. The Mosaic laws talked about consequences or punishment for sin, along with a few promises of reward for obedience. Aside from holding God in reverence, they deal with living within a civil society. There are over 600 laws contained in the Mosaic Law including the 10 which we most often remember.

The Sadducees only recognized the Torah or written word contained in those first five books. Therefore, they did not read of a resurrection, life after death, or any reward reserved for those who faithfully observed the law or punishment for those who failed to live according to the law. This does not mean that the Old Testament does not mention life after death. There are several instances where it clearly does speak of life beyond the grave. One of the first that come to my mind is when David was facing the death of the child born from his illicit union with Bathsheba. He fasted and prayed that God would spare his son. The son died and David bathed and ate. His servants questioned his behavior. David told them that while the child was alive, he fasted and prayed for God’s grace and mercy. Then, in the 23rd verse of 2 Samuel 12 we read; **But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” (2 Samuel 12:23 NASB)**

David clearly states the concept of reuniting with his son in the future. He is speaking of a life after death.

David mentions a resurrection in the 71st Psalm when he says that God will bring him up from the depths of the earth.

You who have shown me many troubles and distresses will revive me again, and will bring me up again from the depths of the earth. (Psalm 71:20 NASB)

The prophet Isaiah also tells us that the earth will give back the dead.

Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits. (Isaiah 26:19 NASB)

Even Daniel speaks of the resurrection of both the good and those who will face the wrath of God.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2 NASB)

We have noted in the past that the two main factions of Jewish religious leaders were the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Pharisees accepted the writings of the prophets and the various books of history and poetry that are included in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. The Sadducees strictly held to only the original written Torah or the first five books which contained the Law of Moses. Thus, the Sadducees did not believe in life after death. Their rigid adherence

to the written Torah also meant that they did not look for or expect the Messiah. It is little wonder that they had a difficult time dealing with Jesus.

It is with this bit of background; we may approach an event that happened one night when a Pharisee came to meet with Jesus secretly.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs (Or *miracles*) that You do unless God is with him.” (John 3:1-2 NASB)

Here we have one of the religious rulers who had heard of and possibly seen Jesus’ teaching and performing miracles. He is aware of the Messiah and is expecting this Messiah to come and deliver the Jews from Roman oppression. He, under cover of night, goes to interview Jesus. While he is doing his research, he does not welcome the ridicule from his peers that have not listened to Jesus and had similar questions.

There are many views about Nicodemus and his motives for coming to visit Jesus. My personal belief is that he is genuine in seeking to know more about Jesus. My opinion is based on the fact that as we read more of Nicodemus, we learn that he comes to believe in Jesus and even helps prepare the body of Jesus when He is taken down from the cross.

So, Nicodemus has come to acknowledge that Jesus must be sent from God. Perhaps Nicodemus believed that his position as a member of the Sanhedrin assured his place in the kingdom of God. This may explain the way Jesus responded to Nicodemus assertion that Jesus was sent by God. **Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3 NASB)**

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again if he wants to see the kingdom of God. Now, we like Nicodemus, may be wondering about this rebirth process. There is one word that we need to have a better understanding from this sentence. The word **again** is the Greek word ἀνωθεν pronounced anōthen (*an'-o-then*) meaning from above; by analogy, from the first; by implication, anew. The idea of being born again must be a restarting of our life from a heavenly origin. The born-again concept points us upward as we start again.

Nicodemus reacted as most of us would. We have a ridiculous picture of physically being born as an adult.

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” (John 3:4 NASB)

Jesus takes the time to explain to Nicodemus that the birth is a spiritual birth that come from realms that are not visible but still evident.

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:5-8 NASB)

Nicodemus is still trying to grasp the meaning of what Jesus is telling him.

Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell

you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. (John 3:9-13 NASB)

Jesus tells Nicodemus that if he is having trouble understanding and accepting the teaching of Jesus when He express them in earthly terms, then he will never believe Him if He speaks in heavenly terms.

Jesus then tells him that only one who can truly speak in heavenly terms is someone who has been there. Then He tells Nicodemus that He had **descended from heaven**. Jesus clearly tells Nicodemus that He came down from heaven and calls Himself the Son of Man.

Now Jesus turns to two critical points of His mission; eternal life and salvation. He mentions the time when the children of Israel complained against God and Moses. God sent fiery serpents to bite them and many died. On God's instructions, Moses lifted a bronze serpent on a standard for the children of Israel who had been bitten to look upon and they were spared. Jesus is looking ahead to the time when He would be lifted up for all see and believe.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. (John 3:14-15 NASB)

Jesus then sums up God's master plan that is being finished through Jesus.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. (John 3:16-17 NASB)

The mission of Jesus is not to bring judgement for our sins. If that had been His mission, He would have destroyed the world with no one left to be redeemed. We have all sinned and thus deserve the penalty for our sin. Jesus came so that we might through Him have eternal life and have our salvation.

From what we read of Nicodemus in the rest of John's gospel, he believed in Jesus. We have just read the same message that Jesus shared with Nicodemus. Will we believe and share in the blessings that Jesus promised? Will we enjoy eternal life in Him?