

# The Life Everlasting

## John 14:1-3

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Easter proclaims the resurrection of Jesus, which, in turn, promises our resurrection to eternal life.

There is widespread interest in the life eternal these days. We can kind of measure that widespread interest by way of book sales. *Heaven Is For Real*, about a young boy's near death out-of-body experience, continues on *The New York Times* best seller list for paperbacks. So there must be wide interest in the subject.

Rather than concentrate on that book, written with the help of Sarah Palin's collaborator on *Going Rogue*<sup>1</sup>, I think I will stick with the book John wrote. From the great and memorable lines opening John's fourteenth chapter, we can gain certain insights into the life everlasting.

### *Life in the Father's House*

To begin with, this scripture teaches the life everlasting is life in the Father's house. Other scriptures have it, too. The old poet, the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalmist, caught sight of it a bit. You know how his poem ends. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me / all the days of my life, / and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord / forever." Jesus carries this motif further and makes the dwelling place more personal. He calls it the Father's house. "In my Father's house are many rooms."

I do not want that term taken away from us. I understand and support the reasons the idea of God as Father receives diminished use today. The term is gender-exclusive and can make it seem as though God is male, which God is not. God is neither male nor female. And not everyone has had a positive role model for a father. To those with that kind of negative experience, the term "father" is ugly, unkind, and decidedly unhelpful.

But rather than let poor examples of fatherhood rob us of the best of what the Bible would have us know, let us think of fatherhood according to its highest examples. I just heard of an 86-year-old

great-grandfather romping around with his great-grandchild in a game of tag. That's the kind of Father God is: fun, loving, interested in what the child is interested in, fully engaged in the child's life, and with the child's best interests at heart.

Jesus says everlasting life is life in that kind of Father's house. It is a life of love and laughter. It is a life of warmth and strength and tenderness and all that is good about a good father's home.

#### *Life in a Prepared Room*

Our passage goes on to teach the life everlasting is like life in a prepared room. Years ago, when I traveled to Kenya, there was nothing but strangeness around me when I landed at the airport in Nairobi. The sights were strange. The smells were strange. The language was strange. Nothing looked like anything that could give me my bearings. But then I was taken to the friend's home where I would stay. There I found a room specially prepared for me. My hosts knew I was coming and had anticipated and seen to my every need. There was water safe to drink, snacks to eat, a mosquito net to sleep under, a toothbrush, all kinds of toiletries, and more. I felt the oddity of lying down to sleep on the opposite side of the equator, but the oddity was almost fully abated by the prepared room.

We have had a number of babies born to this church over the course of the last year. Each one of those babies experienced, I trust, what you experienced when you were born. They were brought home to a room lovingly prepared – a bed, perhaps a quilt, special receiving blankets, clothes, and more, including gifts from loved ones.

Faith says that when you die you will go to a place like that. It will not be a room, literally; at least I do not think it will be. But it will be a place fittingly and lovingly prepared for you, unique to you, and where you will feel wonderfully at home. The life everlasting is in a prepared room in the Father's house.

#### *Life with Christ*

Our text goes on to teach the everlasting life is life with Christ. Dr. Blackwood told the story on himself that, when he was a young pastor, he announced a sermon series on heaven. He called the series a failure. One of the reasons it failed, he says, is because he announced topics he did not know anything about. He called the last sermon in the series "The Geography of Heaven." When he came to write it, he realized he hadn't the foggiest notion about anything of the geography of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Well, we do not know much about heaven, geographically or otherwise. But we are given great insight into it when we hear the Master say these powerful words: "I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." Whatever the life everlasting is, it is life with Jesus.

And we do know something about that. The times we spend in prayer teach us what fellowship with Jesus is like. The times we sit at his table and know the splendid hospitality of his welcome, the times we read his word and follow his actions across the pages of the Bible, the times we gather with his people in the sanctuary: these all teach us something of what being with Jesus is like. If we are no strangers to his fellowship now, then the heavenly life will not bring anything new into our lives but will be a continuation of the conversation with the one who has long been our Friend here on earth. When you die you shall go to your Father's house, to your prepared room, and to be with Jesus you Friend.

#### *Life with Others*

Our text adds, indirectly but certainly, that the life everlasting is a life with others. Passage after passage of the New Testament makes it plain that the heavenly life is a life in community with others and not a life in isolation. The passage from the Gospel According to John that we are in today makes this point indirectly, for the uses of the pronoun *you* are plural. The promise is not to an isolated individual but to a group. The community we know here will be a community we enjoy there.

At funerals I love to pray about how the deceased, now living the life everlasting, is enjoying happy reunion with family and friends who have gone before. That speaks of one of my fondest images of the life everlasting. I happened to see a picture the other day. It was taken decades ago at a family gathering. Every person in the picture, save one or two, is gone now. It was taken at a birthday party. The group was seated around a table laden with cake and ice cream. There were smiles on every face and, I believe, joy in every heart. I think scripture gives us to believe that is what heaven is like.

A young man had a dream a couple of years ago in which he dreamed he could make a telephone call to heaven and speak with his uncle. While on the phone, the young man could hear voices in the background, and his uncle told him his grandfather was there, too. I think there is more vision than dream in that dream. The life

everlasting is happy reunion with family and friends who have gone on before.

Easter proclaims the resurrection of Jesus, which, in turn, promises our resurrection to eternal life. What is that eternal life like? The best seller called "The Bible" is full of information. In just a few verses of one chapter we can find the life everlasting is life in the Father's house, life in a prepared room, life with Jesus, and life with others.

Braced with a faith like that, we need not be afraid to die or to surrender our loved ones to death. Beloved, we are Easter people. "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Bosman, "Celestial Sales for Boy's Tour of Heaven," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2011. Available online [www.nytimes.com/2011/03/12/books/heaven-is-for-real-is-publishing-phenomenon.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/12/books/heaven-is-for-real-is-publishing-phenomenon.html?_r=1) Available April 22, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew W. Blackwood, *Preaching from the Bible* (1941, rpt.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 92-93.