

Believe in Jesus and Live Forever

Various bible passages from John from the series, "Beautiful Savior: Jesus in the Gospel of John"

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Harold has a new friend named Trish, a teenage girl who works afternoons at the pharmacy conveniently located in the grocery store where Harold shops. She not only knows Harold by name, but she can recite every medication that he takes for every malady that his 74-year-old body has developed. These days, there's a drug for every dilemma: arthritis, anxiety, asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, depression, glaucoma, high blood pressure, incontinence, post traumatic stress disorder, irritable bowel syndrome, osteoporosis, and of course the common cold. Thankfully, all of these maladies are treatable by drugs as well as other beneficial therapies whether it's a homeopathic remedy, a visit to the chiropractor, or the skill of an acupuncturist. In short, physical, emotional, and mental maladies don't need to ruin our lives. Their negative impact can be minimized to help make life better. Even longer.

Harold knows this, and so he loads up regularly at the pharmacy and uses his powder blue colored plastic receptacle with its coded little trays and lids for each day of the week three times each day. How much better the meds make Harold's life is sometimes hard to tell because of their side effects. How much longer they will allow him to live is even more difficult to determine. But for now, they provide welcome relief.

For now. Until he develops a new cancer or another illness or is diagnosed with an incurable disease. Harold tries not to think about that, however. Because that signals the beginning of the end. He's attended too many funerals lately and he often wonders when it will be his turn. More than that, how long the process of dying will be and where he will go after that. To be honest, he's not really sure. Will he just cease to exist like a candlewick burned down to nothing, never to be lit again? Will his spirit be transferred by some force into an animal of some sort or maybe another person living 600 years from now? Will he float around in the clouds like an angel or perhaps receive permission to haunt his enemies? Will he be in heaven? He hopes so. He's a decent person, after all, and has always tried to be good to other people. But he isn't certain. He isn't certain because he knows there have been those times of anger, greed, selfishness, and dirty thoughts that God surely knows. Will those hurt his chances of heaven? Would God really hold those against him? He hopes not. But he isn't certain. He just doesn't know.

In the end, Harold's uncertainty about life and death is the worst malady of all. He wishes there'd be a pill he could take for that too.

As the world prepares to celebrate Christmas just over a week away, the good news for Harold, for you, and for all people is that uncertainty about life and death is not an incurable condition. The cure is not, however, in a pill or a prescription but in a person. Jesus. The Savior. The beautiful Savior we are rediscovering in various passages from the gospel of John for this Message from the Master series. Today the gospel of John announces a certainty about life and death found in that Savior. ***Believe in Jesus and Live Forever.***

A quick glance at the gospel of John will reveal that some of the first words of the gospel take us to a time when there was no Alzheimer's disease, no hearing loss, and not even death itself. The beginning of our world's existence after God created light, oceans, evergreen trees, squirrels, and people. For a while everything and everyone lived in perfect harmony, and it was God's intent that everything and everyone go on living in perfect harmony without

end. Forever. That divine plan shattered when Adam and Eve sinned, cursing the plan with corruption, destruction, violence, sickness, thorns, strife, and death. So powerful was the curse of sin and death that it imbedded itself into the reproductive process, like a malignant defect, and has been passed on to every human being ever since in what we call original sin. In John chapter 3 Jesus explains to Nicodemus, *“Flesh gives birth to flesh”* (v. 6). All people, born with a sinful nature imbedded in our humanity (our “flesh”), are destined as mortals and doomed to physical death. That’s only an indication, however, of the depraved spiritual condition that is ours by nature. According to Jesus, the consequence of that spiritual condition is that *“God’s wrath remains on”* us (John 3:36). We refer to this wrath of God as spiritual death, separation from all God’s spiritual blessings. Therefore, a person can be physically alive but spiritually dead and that spiritual death, that separation from God’s blessings, becomes permanent and eternal at the moment of physical death unless a person *“has crossed over from death to life”* (John 5:24). This happens not by a pill, not by behavioral therapy, but by faith. *“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”* (John 3:16). People were created to live forever, but because of sin people now die. In his love for sinners, however, God provides a way out of death, a Savior in his Son Jesus, who turns death from a dead end into a doorway to heaven.

Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Arizona, knows something about extending life. They believe that if a body is frozen upon cardiac death, there remains a possibility that some time in the future the technology will exist to treat such a person who can be unfrozen, cured, and live on. It’s where the body of baseball player Ted Williams now hangs in liquid nitrogen at 350 degrees below zero. It’s not cheap, either: Alcor charges \$150 to sign up, \$400 a year thereafter and \$120,000 upon death. But for those hoping to cheat death, it’s worth the expense.

The gospel of John offers a much better – as a matter of fact, a perfect – solution that robs death of its permanent curse. Jesus promises, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”* (John 11:25,26). Lying in his tomb Jesus was stone cold dead. Miraculously he cheated death by conquering its curse and rising to life. Everyone who relies on Jesus and his promise will do the same and will live even though he or she dies. And to be technical about it, that person will never die but continue to exist as an individual being and soul created by God even though the shell of the body ceases to function. Until Judgment Day, the last day of the world’s existence, when Jesus will return and call all the dead bodies forth from their graves or their ashes or their other decomposition and raise them up to join their souls – believers joining their souls in heaven, unbelievers joining their souls in hell. *“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:40), Jesus promises. So don’t worry and don’t be afraid about what will happen to you at death. **Believe in Jesus and Live Forever.** At your death your soul will continue living, remaining connected to God in heaven. Your body will decompose, only to be raised by the call of Jesus on Judgment Day. Take comfort from Jesus who explains about eternal life in heaven this way, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. 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 there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* (John 14:1-3).

But there’s more. Just as believers enjoy life after death, be assured that believers enjoy life before death. Both of these lives are based on one truth, as John writes, *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”* (John 17:3). A believer’s life of faith on earth and a believer’s life of glory in heaven find their joy and fulfillment in the only true God, particularly our Savior Jesus Christ sent to live, die, and rise again to make us right with God and ready for life. Although a believer’s life on this earth is corrupted by sin, Jesus makes it clear that he cares for us and uses even our troubles for the good purpose of keeping us on his path. *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand”* (John 10:27,28). **Believe in Jesus and Live Forever.**

Enjoy an everlasting life that has already begun. Live a life of joy and fulfillment right now following Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who stated, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). Jesus does

not want you to have a one-third life or a half-life or a five-eighths life. He wants you to have a full life. Right now and forever. How is that possible when your income is limited or you're living with arthritis or you can't escape the mistakes of your past? Jesus provides just what you need. His promises. Written down. Repeated. Fulfilled. At the end of his gospel John writes, "*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:31). So go to the Scriptures. Read your Bible. Ponder the promises of God. ***Believe in Jesus and Live Forever.***

Throughout the gospel of John the full life of a believer – from the first trusting of faith to the eternal glory that will be ours in heaven – has its source in only one remedy for sin and death. Jesus. He is, therefore, compared to the food and drink that fuels our body, providing proper nutrition for healthy living. "*Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst,*" (John 4:14) Jesus explains. He continues later, "*He who feeds on this bread will live forever*" (John 6:58). ***Believe in Jesus and Live Forever.*** He is the "*food that endures to eternal life*" (John 6:27).

For all the medications and therapies that treat the maladies of ill health, there's something that none of them will work without. A healthy, balanced diet and plenty of fluids. Today the gospel of John reminds us that there's no magic pill we can take to cure our uncertainty and feelings of hopelessness and loneliness and make us live more comfortably and longer. Actually, there's something better. A Savior who already won eternal life and offers it as a gift to those who believe. ***Believe in Jesus and Live Forever.*** Amen.