

Life is eternal

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When tragedy strikes it is helpful to know that life is eternal. The Scriptures assure us of eternal life. There are many well-known passages, but one of my favorites is Titus 1:1,2. “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”

God has promised man eternal life. It is not an option. The beloved disciple, John, repeats this promise in I John 2:25, “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”

Perhaps in human terms, we can think of eternal life as similar to an airplane trip. When the airplane disappears out of sight, those aboard have not died. They are still flying on. The plane is still traveling forward. We trust that, even though we cannot see it. So man’s life is continuous. We miss seeing those who have traveled on, but we can be assured that they are living and loving and progressing. Their trip is simply continuing without us.

The 23rd Psalm has a profound spiritual insight into the specific nature of eternal life. We can think of the first three verses as describing our experience here on earth. God protects us, leads us to Him, restores our original spiritual sense of identity.

The fourth verse describes what takes place when one appears to die. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

How better could the Psalmist have put it that death is not an end, that life is eternal? He says that we walk through. We don’t stop and stay in the valley. And it is the valley of the shadow of death. Not even death itself. Even during this experience, God is with the person, comforting them and assuring them. At no point is the person alone.

What happens after the appearance of death? The Psalmist saw deeply into the nature of spiritual life when he told us in the following verses exactly what takes place when a person has passed out of our sight. God prepares a reception, right in the midst of what seems to be a terrible experience. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." If you were preparing a reception for a guest, wouldn't you include those who would love and care about the guest? Wouldn't God do the same?

The person recognizes an abundance of good and loving care for him. "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." And his life continues on. He continues growing, unfolding, and progressing. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

It is tragic when a loved one makes this journey needlessly whether as a victim of war, crime or accident. We miss knowing how they are doing. Miss sharing our experiences with them.

But they are not dead. They are continuing to work out their salvation in the way pointed out by Jesus Christ.

To prepare the disciples for his apparent death, Jesus assured and reassured them of the resurrection and eternal life. He urged them to rejoice. This they were not able to do after the crucifixion. But when they saw proof of Jesus' resurrection, they no longer mourned when he again disappeared from their sight in the ascension. They knew without doubt that he was not dead. He was simply beyond their human sight. They rejoiced and went on to lead productive and fruitful lives right here. We must do the same.

When someone passes on, let us take comfort in the assurances of eternal life. Let us trust in their continuity and progress. And let us make our lives on earth full of doing good and being good, full of willingness to listen and obedience to God.

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