

# **Sermon Text for February 1, 2015**

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*Psalm 23, Romans 6:20-23*

“Everlasting life”

We are back in the Apostles’ Creed and we only have 2 more weeks left before we finish the series. Today we look at the phrase that we say every Sunday: We believe in the life everlasting. It seems like a great complement to the resurrection of the body, especially if we remember that this body will become perfect and perfectly suited to serve out God’s purposes.

Paul tells us in our Scripture today that we must make a very fundamental basic decision and this decision is between death and life. He tells us that our decision to follow God through Jesus Christ or not, will ultimately dictate whether we receive this promise of everlasting life or not. The promise is the gift of eternal life, of the life everlasting, and what we are not used to hearing, is that this life begins here, today, in the here and now. It is not just a promise for our glorified bodies, it is a promise for us today. Today we are going to recognize that we are faced with daily decisions, and Paul tells us that we make these decisions based upon who governs our life. These decisions will prove who is Lord of our life, and if Christ is, then we shall have eternal life.

One thing I found over my 20 years of ministry having traveled to over 30 countries and been in every state but Hawaii, is that the problems that we face here in Strasburg, while different, are very much the same. Parents worry about their children, single adults worry about finding a spouse, workers worry about their jobs, kids worry about their friends. What Paul tells us in relationship to obtaining the final prize is that we cannot be middle of the road people, or else we get hit by traffic from both sides. We must be hot or cold, it is not possible to be lukewarm, it is not possible to say sometimes I choose Christ because ultimately it means that Christ is not Lord but rather someone else is in those other times. Let’s look at the ramifications of our decision in our life as they relate to the eternal life that God promises us.

The stereotypical alien movie of the past has the ET’s landing and telling the earthlings take me to your leader. I’ve sometimes wondered what would you do if that happened, who would your leader be? As Christians if that happened, how would we take that alien to Christ? We couldn’t show them our Savior, how would we express to them the love and power and grace and forgiveness of Christ to those for whom that

concept is absolutely foreign. How would we take an alien to our leader? The question as to who is our leader is fundamental to Paul's argument in Romans here.

The question of who is our leader, who is our lord, who is our master, cuts to the core of what we do, how we act and react in this world. If our leader is dishonest, then dishonesty will be a virtue. If our leader is loving, then love will be valued. Paul understands the necessity for Christians to understand who their leader is, and just as importantly to choose to live our lives in light of how that leader would want us to live.

Obviously we would say that Jesus Christ is our leader, the head of the church, the lord of our lives. But if this is the case then why do we not act in such a way that reflects who our leader is. This is what is so puzzling to me, that as Christians we proclaim the most righteous person to have ever lived to be our leader, but our actions betray something entirely different, do they not?

Psalm 23 gives us a beautiful picture of one who has decided to lay their life in the loving hand of God. One life situation after another is mentioned which shows the faith and confidence that this person has in God because they have chosen to follow God. They face adversaries, they face death, they face tragedy. The very last verses reflects the free gift of God for those who choose God, for those who choose to follow God's presence and that is everlasting life. Who knows who wrote this Psalm? King David, that's right. We know his story in life as well, as hard as he tried to follow the living Lord, he failed, he didn't always live in the way that God wanted him to.

Moses in Deuteronomy 30:19 likewise approaches the Israelites and tells them: today you must choose between life and death. Of course, if the choice is left up to us we will always choose life. But Moses states choosing life means: loving the Lord your God, obeying him. We find out that in fact although in theory they want to choose life, their action, and faithlessness reflects the fact that de facto they choose death.

Joshua in the very well known verse is the same. Joshua 24:15 he confronts them at Shechem and states: now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose whom you will serve, the god of old, but as for me and my household we will serve the Lord. The people respond, far be it from us that we forsake the Lord. The people of God since Genesis have had a choice whom to serve God or the serpent. And although we want to serve God, we don't usually do what we know is right and what we know God wants for us to do. Paul states it this way in 7:18 I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

Why is that? The reason this happens is because so many of us want to remain neutral. We say: I like what Jesus has to say, I agree, but I really don't want to commit myself completely. Paul says it is impossible to take a neutral stance, it is impossible to wait and see because in that instance you are making a choice either for or against.

The impact this has is that we choose to go against life in the here and now. Eternal life is not just a concept that begins once we die. Everlasting life begins now with the decisions that we make to follow Christ or not. Our Salvation hinges on the decision that God made for us through Jesus Christ on the cross. Everlasting life is something that is influenced by our decisions now because it begins now if we would so choose.

I have a friend from college who one day we were talking in the car and, he is not a Christian, and he stated, you know I don't have to be a Christian to do good or to want to be a good person. I choose not to be a Christian and just have a neutral approach to life. I told him that was impossible. His outlook on life was not neutral but rather shaped by his upbringing, his environment, his experiences all interacted and all were very fluid with no foundational system behind it. This conversation happened about 15 years ago, before he had kids, or was married. Now, I spoke to him in the fall, he has kids, is married, and is on the vestry at an Episcopalian church close to where he lives. He realized being neutral was a stance that he did not want to take, and that it had an impact on his present life.

Paul states it this way. In verse 20 we read that when we were slaves to sin, it really didn't matter what we did and our main focus was not upon righteousness. So we are free in this sense from having to do good. Before we knew Christ we were slaves to sin and free from God and life. This provided us with an advantage that we no longer have once we are in Christ and that advantage is death. We may not have known it but that was our wage, eternal life didn't even enter the picture.

But now that we are set free from sin we are slaves to God. The question is never that of independence, it is never that of autonomy, but rather it is to whom we choose to be a slave. That's a problem for some people because we want to know the truth that sets us free. Jesus Christ is the truth that sets us free from sin but makes us a slave to him.

Paul tells us we have that choice. There is no living without a master, we are all slaves to something or someone. The advantage of choosing Christ, Paul states is sanctification which leads to eternal life. We live our lives as an attempt to be made holy

in Christ. This life, this current life of trying to be made holy, is the beginning of everlasting life. We enact spiritual disciplines that prevent us from being re-enslaved. I John 3:14 tells us we pass from death to life. This decision for life requires the Christian to make adjustments in our life. Otherwise the problem of Luke 11:26 will arise that when the demons are set out and the house if cleared they come back and it is worse than before. But the result of this decision, for here and now and for once our bodies are glorified in the resurrection is eternal life. We find this in John 3:16 and in verse 22 we read the end is eternal life.

Paul in the final verse lays it out for us clearly so that we would not be confused. He states for the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life. This is not a mystery, there is no deep hidden truth here. What we hear is if we choose to follow sin then our wages, what we deserve, the payment that we get is death, final death.

To whom are you a slave? Many of you are leaders in whatever field you serve. Be especially careful because there is a tendency for us who are leaders to think that we are masters of our own domain. That we are ultimately in control in the area of life over which we have been given leadership. That is not the case, the kings of the Bible teach us differently. God is always in our control and our decision is to choose him, or choose society, your impulses, your fluid emotions and feelings, nothing concrete really governs you. This bondage will lead to a spiritual death. Today we must choose, for it affects our life, it affects our life everlasting. Who is our leader will affect whether we accept life or death. Amen.