

"Are you living, or are you just breathing?"

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[0 : 0 0] Are you living or are you just breathing? Someone once asked that question. And it's a good question. Because we all know that when we talk about life, we mean more than just breathing and our hearts beating, don't we?

When we talk about life. Life is more than oxygen being supplied to our brains. And I think we all know that. Life, there's more to it than that. But the question is, if there's more to life than just the physical, what is it?

What is life? What do we mean when we talk about life? What does the Bible mean when it tells us about life? And that's a very important question to ask, especially on Easter Sunday.

Because this day is all about celebrating life. And what Jesus did to bring us eternal life. But when we say eternal life, do we just mean physical life that goes on and on and on?

Or is there more to it than that? Well, you see, when the Bible talks about eternal life, it doesn't just mean physical life. It doesn't just mean, okay, well, your heart's going to carry on beating for billions of years.

[1 : 0 9] I mean, physical life, eternal physical life, that's part of it. But the life that Jesus came to bring and the life that he opened the door to on Easter Sunday is more than just physical life.

What's interesting is how the Bible describes life and what eternal life is all about. And how Jesus himself describes the life that he came to bring to us.

And he does that the night before he died. On the Thursday night, before he was arrested, it's recorded in John 17 for us.

It's Jesus' prayer to the Father for his disciples, which he prayed this Thursday night. Listen to what he says. He says, Now this is eternal life that they know you.

See, so the eternal life that Jesus was about to open up to the world and for his disciples was far more than just living forever.

[2 : 2 5] No, real eternal life, in Jesus' own words, is this. To know God. But we should know that when the Bible talks about knowing, it doesn't just talk about an intellectual kind of knowledge, a head knowledge.

You see, in the Bible, to know someone is to know them intimately, to love them. To have a very special, deep, close relationship with them.

In other words, to summarize what Jesus is saying. Life equals loving God. That is real life. Life is loving God.

You know how heaven is described in the Bible? Very interesting. If you had to go to all the passages that described heaven. We're told a lot about heaven.

And we're told it's a whole new creation. But we're not told details about what that creation will be like. You know, will there be cars?

[3 : 30] I've always wondered that. Will there be cars in heaven? I mean, I know some of you here like cars. And I'm kind of looking at the back left of the church there. The Johnson family, for example.

Will there be cars in heaven? Will there be hot rods? I don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. What will we do? What will we be occupied with in our lives?

Where will we live? What will our houses look like? Have you wondered these things? I have. But the fact is, none of that matters.

Because according to the Bible, the main feature of heaven is that we will be with God. All the other details fade in comparison to that. For example, listen to what the Apostle Paul is most excited about when he thinks of heaven.

This is from 1 Thessalonians. He's talking about when Jesus returns. And he says, We who are still alive and who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

[4 : 28] And so we will be with the Lord forever. Yeah, but will we have cars, Paul? You didn't tell us about that. You know, what will our mansions be like? What will we do? Who cares?

We will be with the Lord. That's all that matters. A Christian author writes this. He says, It is important to understand that heaven is not the goal. But many people have mistakenly made heaven the goal of life.

And that's a very good correction for us, I think. Heaven is not the goal. God himself is the goal. Jesus didn't go through all that he went through just to bring us to a new world.

He went through it to bring us to God. To bring us to know and love God intimately. Not primarily to experience his blessings, but to experience him, the source of those blessings.

So much so that those blessings themselves are hardly worth mentioning. You know, in heaven we'll hardly notice all the amazing beauty around us because we will be absorbed by knowing God without limit.

[5 : 34] And that is what eternal life, according to Jesus, is. That is what he prayed for on Thursday night. That is why he died for us.

And that is why he rose again. To bring us to God. To bring us to love God. Now, if you don't want that.

If you're not interested in loving God. Then heaven's not for you. And so ask yourself, is that what you really want? Do you really want to love and know God intimately?

Is that your ultimate objective in life? Because let's be honest with ourselves. All too often our focus, even as Christians, is to experience what God can give us rather than to experience God himself.

I mean, just look at our prayers. What are we praying for? We're praying for God to give us stuff. How often are we praying for God to give us himself? How often are we praying that we may have a closer understanding and appreciation and love for God himself?

[6 : 43] Rather than what he can give us. And you see, the reason we're focused on what God can give us more than him is, well, because we're sinners. We're idolaters at heart.

We worship created things rather than the creator, Romans tells us. That's our natural inclination. To worship created things. And so, you see, salvation is really not just about getting us to heaven.

Salvation is about changing us to want heaven as it truly is. In other words, changing our hearts to want God. And so, being a Christian in this world is actually a journey towards loving God with all your being.

That's what we're here to do. God is preparing us for him. For himself. And in this life, he's teaching us. Through Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

And through the circumstances of life. And through trials in life. Through all of the things he puts us through. He's teaching us. To love him above all other things. That's what we're doing here.

[7 : 53] And this Easter Sunday, I want you to know how you can start that journey towards loving God with all of your being. And we find the answer in 1 John 2.15-17.

The passage in front of you. I'm going to read it again. John is telling us, training us, helping us to know how we can learn to love God. And therefore prepare for heaven.

Listen to what he says. He says, do not love the world. Or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away. But whoever does the will of God. Lives forever. And so here John is revealing a vital fact.

When it comes to thinking about eternal life and salvation. And the fact he's wanting us to get. Is that you will either love the world and the things of the world. Or you will love God.

[8 : 56] But you can't do both. And the reason is because they lead in opposite directions. That's his point. Loving the world leads to eternal death. Loving God leads to eternal life.

It is eternal life. And because they're opposites. Because they lead in different directions. That means before you can start on this journey of growing to love God with all your being.

You must first stop loving the things of the world. That's the first step really. And so what are those things? What exactly does John mean by loving the things of the world?

Well let's have a look. He summarizes what he means in verse 16. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. So according to John, these are the major things preventing us from truly loving God.

And experiencing life. If you struggle to love God. If you're honest with yourself and you say, you know, at the moment I don't love God with all my being. Well John's saying this is why. These are the things that are stopping you.

[10 : 05] So let's look at them. The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. In other words, a desire for things we don't have. In other words, covetousness.

The Bible calls it covetousness. Wanting what you haven't got and spending your life and energy chasing after what you haven't yet got. And we see that everywhere we look, don't we? This world is wired for covetousness.

Magazine adverts are designed to make us want and feel that we need things that we don't yet have. I mean, you watch a YouTube video on the internet and it starts with an advert telling you another thing that you don't have and you need to make you covet.

And you have to watch at least five seconds of it before you can skip ahead. And the global economy is set up on the assumption that people will keep spending money to get things that they want even if they don't need them.

You know, a new iPhone gets released and what do people do? They drop their old iPhone like a hot potato even though there's nothing wrong with it and it works fine. No, they need the new one.

[11 : 10] But you see, covetousness comes out not just in what we spend our money on. Also in what we spend our energy on. People will work hard for their entire careers and make many sacrifices in life just for the dream of a comfortable retirement.

And the kind of life that they've always coveted. And that absorbs their focus every day. So things like church and God and fellowship and relationships actually take a back seat because of covetousness.

You see how covetousness actually can take us away from God. And not just what we spend our energy on, but what we spend our thoughts on as well. I mean, consider what takes up your thoughts every day.

If you had to draw a pie chart of what you spend your thinking on. That'll determine what your heart is set on, what your thoughts are set on. Whether that's another person or a dream that you're chasing.

Or whatever it is, a recreational activity. What your thoughts are focused on most of the day. That's what your heart is set on. Well, John says here quite clearly, if your focus is on these things, then it can't be on God.

[12 : 30] If your love is set on created things, it won't be set on the Creator. So, in a way, our heart is like a camera lens. If you put a lens on a camera, you can either typically focus on an object in the foreground, and then the background is mostly blurred.

Or you can focus on an object in the background, and then the foreground will be blurred. Generally. And if they're far enough apart, you can't focus on both.

And I know there's, like, field of focus and stuff like that. But the fact is, like, if they're far enough apart, you can't possibly get a lens to focus on both of them. You have to choose one of the things to focus on, either in the foreground or the background.

And, you see, the things of the world and the things of God are too far apart to be able to focus on both. So, you must choose. And you must know that if you choose to love the things of the world, and you focus and set your mind and your heart on them, you will not be able to love God.

And that probably answers your question, why do I feel that I don't love God? Well, John says, because you love the things of the world. And John warns us in verse 15, if anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

[13 : 52] Secondly, though, loving the things of the world is not just a desire for what we don't have. It's also worshipping the things we do have. You see that? John talks about that when he says the pride of life.

That's what he means. Worshipping the things we do have. This phrase in the original language actually means boasting in the things of life. Boasting to others and boasting to yourself in what you have.

Finding your identity and your pleasure in the things on earth. How much money you have. How successful you are. How beautiful you are. These false gods, these idols of today's world that we see all over the media.

Telling you this is what you need to find identity. You need to be beautiful like this magazine model. Or you need to be successful like this businessman. Then you will have arrived.

When you've got those things, then you've arrived. That's generally what our world is telling us, isn't it? To arrive is to have these things. Well, I want you to listen to a story Jesus tells about a man who thought he had arrived.

[15 : 04] It's from Luke 12. You don't have to turn there. Just listen. The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, what shall I do?

I have no place to store my crops. Then he said, this is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, you have plenty of grain laid up for many years.

Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, you fool. This very night your life will be demanded of you.

And then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? And then Jesus says, this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but is not rich towards God.

You see, this man hadn't arrived. He thought he had arrived in life because he was satisfied with life and things and he had enough. But he shouldn't have been.

[16 : 05] That's Jesus' point. He shouldn't have been satisfied with that. Because he hadn't arrived because he didn't love God. True arriving is coming into a relationship of real love with your creator.

That is what it means to arrive, according to Jesus. But you know what's preventing that? Well, John makes it clear. Loving the things of the world. Expressed in covetousness, desiring the things that you don't have, and expressed in idolatry, worshipping and finding ultimate value in the things that you do have.

Now, I want you to notice something about these aspects of loving the world. Covetousness and idolatry. I wonder if you've noticed something about them.

If you look up there at the Ten Commandments that we have conveniently on our wall, you'll notice that those two things are a direct breaking of the first two and the last of the Ten Commandments.

The first two commandments is love God and don't worship idols. And the last is don't covet. You notice that? And here John is saying that those two things are the things that are going to stop you from loving God, which is the very first commandment.

[17 : 18] So, in a way, those commands don't worship idols and don't covet. They're kind of bookends of the whole law of God, of God's entire will for us.

And I think, in a way, they're the major access points of sin into our lives. Idolatry and covetousness. All the other sins we commit really can boil down to one of these two things.

Idolatry or covetousness. We steal, we commit adultery. Why? Because we want something we don't yet have. We covet. We blaspheme and ignore God. Why? Because we don't love and worship Him as much as the things that sin can give us, as much as our idols.

You see, these commandments of idolatry and covetousness, they're like damn walls. When there's a crack in them, when they're broken through, then our whole life gets flooded with sin.

And we fail to love God. You know, how do you think Satan brought sin into the world? He knew what he was doing. When he tempted Eve in the garden, what did he do?

[18 : 24] You remember? He made her covet. You can have knowledge that you don't yet have. Don't you want that? And he made her idolize and love herself more than God.

You'll be like God. You don't need Him anymore. And that is what took us away from God. God, that's when we stopped loving God. When we decided to love and chase after the things of the world and worship created things rather than the Creator.

And it wasn't just Eve. It's all of us. We've been doing it ever since. It wasn't just our mom, Eve. We've inherited that tendency from her. And you know what the end result of that always is?

It's death. That's why we die. That's why death is in our will. That's why death entered the moment Eve fell for Satan's tricks and Adam. But you see that the world and its desires are passing away.

And so are all who chase after them. If you turn your back on God and chase after the things of the world, you will end up where the things of the world will end up. Which is death.

[19 : 27] But here on Easter Sunday morning, we're here to celebrate life. And that Jesus came to bring us out of death and bring us into life.

And so when he did that, you see, he didn't come and die and rise again just to let us carry on chasing after pleasures and idols. Just this time in the new creation.

No. He came to change us to chase after God. And to love him with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength.

That's what his death and resurrection are meant to achieve. That's the significance of Easter Sunday. And that's what being truly saved is.

It's the ability to love God again. That's what salvation is. And the way Jesus achieved that for you and for me was first and foremost by dying to take away the one thing that separates us from God.

[20 : 29] The penalty for our sins. Because, you know, a convicted criminal can never love the judge, can they? No. Unless your sins are dealt with, God will only ever be your judge and you'll never be able to love him.

You'll only ever fear him. But when they're washed clean through faith in the blood of Christ, then you can be free to love God again. As your father, not your judge.

Not least of all, when you realize just what your father gave on Friday to pay for your sins. He did all that so that you can start to love him.

To prepare you for heaven. To take away death and prepare you for eternity. And so what will that look like? Because, you see, that starts now.

The journey towards loving God starts now for each one of us who put our faith in Christ. But what will that look like in our lives? What will loving God look like?

[21 : 29] Well, quite simply, it will mean starting to look to God for the things that you used to look to the world to give you. Realizing that all your desires have actually been designed to be fulfilled in God, not in what he gives you.

Realizing that those moments where you are truly alive, where you're truly living when you're, I don't know, experiencing the beauty of a sunset or the bliss of loving another person.

Those moments are actually glimpses of the face of God who is the designer of that sunset, who is the source of that love.

And so don't make the mistake of looking for your ultimate happiness in those things. Don't set your love on the things of the world, but let them point you to God. And look for your ultimate happiness in him alone, not in the things he gives you.

And don't be disappointed if you don't have those things. But know that if you come to Christ, you'll have access to God himself, which is, as Paul says, better by far. And that is what it is to truly live.

[22 : 42] That is what Jesus died and rose again to give you. And so you see, this life for a Christian, it's a journey towards loving God.

We as a church are here to help each other to do that, help each other along that journey, because we walk it together, not as lonely individuals. We are here as a church community to help each other to stop loving the things of the world and to set our hearts and our hopes and our joy on God alone.

That's what we're here to help each other to do. And that's your responsibility as a Christian towards other Christians, as you meet with them on Sunday during the week, which I hope you do.

I hope you make time to meet with your Christian brothers and sisters during the week. Your responsibility towards them is to help them to grow in their love for God. That's what it's summed up as.

And to help them to stop loving the things of the world. And they're there to help you to do that as well at the same time. To help you to grow in your love for God. But just maybe, this morning, you realize that you haven't even started on that road.

[23 : 58] Maybe you feel nothing for God, if you're honest with yourself. You don't love Him. You feel much more for the things of the world.

Well, maybe that's because your sins are still dividing you from Him, from your Creator. And you don't want to be close to Him.

Deep down inside, it's because you know that you've sinned against Him. And so, you've just got this unspoken urge to run the other direction. That's what sin does. You see, it's like a magnet.

If you have magnets of different polarities, I think, I don't know what the technical stuff is. But you know, you hold magnets and they push apart. Sorry, Michiel? Same polarity, thank you. They push apart if they've got the same polarity.

And no matter how much you push them, you can't get them to touch. You see, that's what our sin does with us and God. When our sin is undealt with, no matter how much we want to love God, it'll push us away from Him. You know what Jesus does?

[24 : 59] He comes to reverse your polarity, if you like. So that you come to God, so that you're attracted to Him, so that you learn to love Him and stick to Him. And if He hasn't done that for you yet, if your sins haven't been dealt with, if your polarity hasn't been reversed, well then, there's no better time than Easter to make that right.

But to put your faith in Jesus now, to let Him take those sins and to turn around and to follow Him out of the world and its desires that are passing away and into a real relationship with God.

Let Him show you how to love God again. Because that's where you'll find life. Eternal life. Forever. Forever. And if you want to do that this morning, then I invite you to pray a prayer in your heart after me.

I'm going to pray the prayer slowly that you can follow along in your heart. If you want to reverse that polarity, if you want to turn around, repent, come back to God. And come to eternal life.

This is your chance. So let's pray. Amen. Father God, I admit my covetousness and idolatry to You now.

[26 : 15] I confess that I love the things of the world more than I love You. Forgive me.

And wash me clean by the blood of Jesus. Help me to follow Him all the days of my life. Come to me now.

Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to love You with all my heart. And all my mind.

And all my strength. And give me eternal life. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.