

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 15, 2010

Age-type Life

by Dan Trygg

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, in order that everyone believing in Him might not perish, but may have age-type life.”

John 3:16

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the one hearing My word, and believing Him who sent Me, *has* age-type life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

John 5:24

“This is age-type life, in order that they may experientially-know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

John 17:3

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the age of this world-system, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:1-7

It is fascinating how our history and religious culture can affect our perception of what the Bible says. Often popular preaching will emphasize a relatively obscure truth way out of context, and miss the clearer, more dominant message. Or, history will, at times, set the stage for us to think in certain ways, when the Biblical text is not really stating what the popular notions happen to be, at all. Quite often, we unthinkingly accept themes and teachings from our current religious culture, without checking them for accuracy. **It is not unusual for American Christians to have kind of a “mutt theology”, a belief system originating from many different lineages. Instead of clear, sharp markings, we have a system of thought with fuzzy ideas and blurry lines.** One example of this is that at times we unwittingly think something is taught *throughout* the Bible, but don't realize it is a concept developed relatively late in the progressive revelation of God. Consequently, we get it all out of balance, and often miss the impact and sharpness it had when it was proclaimed as a new theme. **An example of this is the concept of “eternal life”.**

Most of us might think that the Bible is a book all about eternal life, but that is *not* its main theme, at all. Did you know, for example, that the phrase “eternal life” only occurs *once* in the OT? Only Daniel 12:2 contains this phrase. Psalms 21:4 and 133:3 also could be understood this way, though they actually say, “length of days a long time in the continuing future” and “life to a long time”. That is not to say that the OT has no hope for an afterlife, or even a hope of the resurrection (e.g., Isa. 26:19; Ezk. 37:12-14). It does, but that is *not* the main focus. It is not the center of God's dealing with people. The focus of the OT is on living with God's blessings of long life, prosperity and peace *now*. **A hope of life after death is implicitly understood, but that is not the thrust of OT preaching, at all.**

Then, **in the NT, the phrase “eternal life” occurs only 43 times.** It occurs only 8 times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). In reality, these actually represent only 4 different instances, because 2 of them are in the context of the rich young ruler, and are repeated in each gospel (Matt. 9:16; Mk. 10:17; Lk. 18:18 and Matt. 9:29; Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30). The other contexts are in the parable of the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:46) and the scribe who questions Jesus about eternal life that leads to the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25). Think of that! When you read the first three gospels, Jesus only talks about eternal life on four occasions! *Not* a major theme *at all!* In fact, the rich young ruler, and the scribe *brought the subject up* in two of the contexts, which encompass 7 of the 8 verses. **Amazingly, Jesus brought the subject of eternal life up on *only one occasion* in the first three gospels!** Further, in the book of Acts this phrase also occurs only in one context (13:46,48)! Paul only mentions it 9 times in all of his epistles. It is not in Hebrews, James *or* the writings of Peter, either. It occurs once in Jude 1:21. The phrase “eternal life” is not even *mentioned* in the book of Revelations!

So, where does our perception of this as a major idea come from? It *was* a key idea of Jesus' teaching that the apostle John recorded and emphasized. He uses it 17 times in his gospel and an additional 6 times in his first epistle. That means that over half of the times this concept is mentioned in the NT, it is from the pen of John. How do we account for this difference, and what does it mean?

We need to remember that **John wrote at the end of the first century, long after the other gospels and epistles had been written.** He was well aware of their content. In many ways, it is evident that his gospel was meant to fill in important gaps in our understanding. His epistles were written to correct erroneous teachings and to clarify important ideas. **John outlived all of the other apostles, and most of his contemporaries. Without a doubt, he had the final word regarding the writings of the NT.**

The thrust of the first three gospels had been the Kingdom of God. Both John the Baptist and Jesus had preached that the Kingdom of God was “at hand”. In fact, it is clear that Jesus’ message was that the Kingdom had come, and was working through Him. Matthew had referred to this some 36 times, Mark 14 times and Luke 32 times. **By contrast, John seems to almost studiously avoid this terminology.** He mentions it only in Jn. 3:3,5 and again in 18:36. **Why?** What is he doing? What is he trying to get at?

It is time we talk briefly about the word translated as “eternal”. It is the Greek word, *aiōnion*. **It is the adjective form of the word, *aiōn*, which means “age, a particular stage or period of history, epoch, eon, era, world order”.** It can also refer to a long period of time, or extended time. In Jewish thought, rabbis talked about the present age of evil and the age of the Messiah, the “coming age”. **Since John was a Palestinian Jew, not a philosophical Greek, we ought to go with a Jewish worldview as the primary source for what was probably in his mind** as he wrote about the *aiōn*. **This is unquestionably borne out by the text.** Every time our English translations have “forever” or “never” in John’s writing, John actually wrote “unto the age” (Jn. 4:14; 6:51,58; 8:35,51,52; 10:28; 11:36; 12:34; 13:8; 14:16; I Jn. 2:17). **It is very clear that he was thinking of time in terms of succeeding epochs or ages.** In the book of Revelations, also written by John, there are thirteen verses that contain the English translation “forever and ever”. What John actually wrote was “unto the ages of the ages”. **For John, time is broken up into succeeding ages or eons, which implies that these ages may have different characteristics,** just like there were different dynamics before the fall, when this present evil age began, and there will be different characteristics for existence in the Messianic age to come.

The significance of all of this revolves around the meaning of the word “*aiōnion*”, translated as “eternal” in most English translations. To John, this was not primarily a word about extended life into the future. As I mentioned, *aiōnion* is an adjective from *aiōn*. **In order to get at the meaning, I have chosen to translate it as “age-type”, because it is telling us something about the age to come. In other words, “age-type life” is a quality of life that is characteristic of the future Kingdom of God. It is “Kingdom life” brought to us in the here and now.**

Once we have made this connection, then we can see why John was not talking about the Kingdom of God, as the other gospels had. **What John sought to do was emphasize the internal reality of the Kingdom of God operating within us as believers.** While the other gospels had proclaimed the Kingdom of God, calling people to repentance, forgiveness of sins and a new beginning in relationship with God as their King, **John chose to emphasize the power of “Kingdom-life” which has come to abide within those who trust in Jesus.** Age-type life is life of the age to come reaching back in time to fill and satisfy my soul, and to empower me to live a “Kingdom life”. To John, this present evil age is characterized by brokenness, lostness and ruin. **God loved us enough to send Jesus so that we might not be ruined, but we might have age-type life, life that begins to heal, restore, build us up, and lead us to the fulfillment of God’s purposes** for us. Instead of confusion and ruin, it gives us direction, meaning and vitality. The promise is that when we trust in Jesus we “have” or “presently possess” age-type life. What does it mean to say that we *have* “eternal life” or “everlasting life”? Does that sound like anything has changed in the here and now? **But to say that we have life of the age to come presently infused within our souls now, ...that opens up all kinds of possibilities!** In a very real way we *have* “passed-across out from the death into the life” (Jn. 5:24). The most significant change is described by Jesus in John 17:3. He said, “This is age-type life *in order that they might experientially-know You*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” **The age-type life makes it possible to know God.** Without it, we cannot experientially-know Him. **Eternal life is not the goal, or the end point. It is the beginning of an adventure.** It makes possible the incredible opportunity of truly knowing God.

Paul talked about this in a little different way, but addressing the same truth. In Eph. 2:1-7, he describes how we were dead in our trespasses and sins, walking according to the age of this world-system, according to the spirit working in the sons of disobedience. We too were walking according to fleshly desires and selfish lusts, and were by nature children of wrath, just like everyone else. **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love, even while we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with the Messiah** (saving us by grace), raised us with Him, and seated us in the heavenly places with Him in Christ, the Messiah. He did this so that in the ages to come He might continue to show us the riches of His grace. Again, being made alive is not the goal or the end point. It is the beginning of a great adventure. It is the doorway into an incredible future, one that goes on for ages and ages. **Age-type life is Kingdom-life, and it makes it possible for us to know the King, and to discover way more than we could have ever dreamed.**