***God’s Life to Eternity***

**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Round Top, Texas**

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**September 27th In the Year of Our Lord 2020**

 I first preached this sermon on September 27th, 2020, in memory of one of God’s saints. I have reformatted and added to the text to apply to a general audience. I had presented much of the content in sermons over the previous two years. As always, I followed the Lord’s Spirit in sermon preparation. A number of people and their families were on my mind and heart. During this time, others died too. We are in a small community. Round Top’s population is only 90 (2010 census). However, the population grows on the weekend due to the surrounding region bustling with retirement homes. There is a core of people who are here during the week. For the most part, we all know each other. When one of us dies, the whole community mourns for the loss of life. . . seeking words and thoughts to cope with the reality of temporal life’s end. It is at these times that we Believers are in the spiritual condition and position in life to make a difference.

 At the time I wrote the sermon, my wife, Renee, was on her journey to enter the Lord’s hands. Renee died on September 29th, 2020, from a year- long battle with cancer. The good doctors at M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston could not stop the advance of the rare appendiceal cancer. We knew from November of 2019, when her cancer was diagnosed as stage four, her temporal life would soon come to an end. Temporal life’s end is reality. I had bladder cancer in 2015. I came close to graduating to be with the Lord. It took almost two years for me to be treated (multiple surgeries and chemo) and to feel that I was on the road to remission. When Renee was diagnosed, many people thought that Renee and I had suffered too much. Why does “The” loving God allow His servants to suffer? They could not understand why a couple like us could both contract a deadly disease. We never lived a lifestyle lending to cancer. However, we know God and His Word and accepted the reasons for the fallen environment in which we live. This understanding and acceptance sustained us. We Christians cannot count on a protection from sin and death. God never promised we would escape the hard things of this life. By being Believers, and living the life God has called us, we can avoid many pitfalls, but we are not immune from this fallen human environment. God’s love has planned for us all to leave here.

 So, today, once again, I lean on the Lord to write a message that would address the community at-large. Many are witnessing the passing of a loved one. God built into us the longing to hold onto this life He created. We do not easily give it up. Paul reported in Philippians 1:23-24 that he would rather be with the Lord, but he saw that God still had things for him to do here for the sake of others. We all know we are leaving here. It has been said that “Christians long to be with the Lord in His Heaven, but they do not want to die to get there”.

**This sermon addresses the question of “Why temporal death?”**

**Why does a loving God allow pain and suffering?**

**I opened the sermon with the prayer outline Jesus gave us in Matthew 6.**

Let’s open today’s service with the Lord’s prayer.

 All join and say. . .

Matthew 6:9-13

 **9 Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**

 **10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**

 **11 Give us this day our daily bread.**

 **12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

 **13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.** AMEN

(KJV)

As of late, we have lives passing before us and more to come. In this fallen world. . . Death’s clock never stops ticking. Be it known. . . that God said He would not leave us alone and will be with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). God promises that nothing will separate us from His love.

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39 (NAU)

 So, therefore. . .

 ***"Do not let your heart be troubled;***

 ***believe in God, believe also in Me.***

 ***"In My Father's house are many dwelling places;***

***if it were not so, I would have told you;***

***for I go to prepare a place for you.***

 ***"If I go and prepare a place for you,***

***I will come again and receive you to Myself,***

***that where I am, there you may be also.***

 ***"And you know the way where I am going."***

**John 14:1-4 (NAU)**

We are here today to honor God’s gift of life. We unite under God’s love and grace at a time when saints are ascending to join Him in Heaven.

**God’s Eternal Plan**

God’s eternal plan for our lives was made at the beginning of time. Believers’ names are in God’s Book of Life, the Lamb’s Book of Life, before the foundation of the World. In God’s “perfect knowledge,” God “foreknows” who will surrender to Him. God does not make anyone surrender their heart to Him. The Lord gives us “free will choice”, and we Believers have chosen to surrender to God. Therefore, we are predestined to be with Him for an eternity.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. **Romans 8:29-30** (NAU)

 Due to Believer’s surrendering to the Lord, we strive to walk in the plans God has for our lives (Ephesians 2:10) that God prepared beforehand. This is evident in the fruit our lives produce. We become loving fathers/ mothers, husbands/wives, sons/daughters and a friend to many for all the world to see how the attributes of God work in our lives. This is God’s love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

Even with all these spiritual fruits at work through our hearts. . . God knows that in this life we will never become perfect. God has provided for our shortcomings. God asks us to come to Him, seeking forgiveness of sin, and He is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:4-10).

We are all a work in progress being conformed/renewed (Colossians 3:10) to the image of God/Jesus. We are God’s workmanship, saved by God’s Grace.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. **Ephesians 2:8-10** (NAU)

**The Lord wants us to be with Him.**

Like John 14:1-4, the Gospel of Matthew also declares God has already prepared a place for us.

34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **Matthew 25:34** (NAU)

**God also knows who will not surrender to Him.**

God already knows the names, from the foundation of the world, who will not receive Him (Revelation 13:8, 17:8) and whose names are not in the Book of Life.

**Why Does Temporal Life End and Eternal Life Begin?**

We are here today to respond to this question. You may find this hard to believe, but there is a biblical explanation that starts with God’s love and our *free will choice* with which He created us. Never forget that from the point of Adam and Eve’s choice to rebel against God (The Fall – Genesis 3), . . . God provided a plan for us not to be stuck in a sinful state and in this fallen world forever. God does not desire for us to be stranded forever in the environment of sin and death.

 Remember that the biblical definition of God is that He is Love (1 John 4:8), and we are made in His image. By love’s function, definition and application, it is a choice (1 Corinthians 13). And remember that God chose to love us first (1 John 4:19). Because we are created in God’s image, our lives are intended, by God, to emanate His love. After all, the two greatest commands are to love God and our neighbor (Mark 12:28ff).

So, it is God’s grace-compassion-love that provides us a choice to surrender to His will. . .thereby elevating ourselves from this fallen world through rebirth of spirit (John 3). However, for this graduation to fully come to fruition. . .we have to leave this fallen world through temporal death’s door. In short, our temporal life has to end because God made love a choice over sin and death and the things that are at war with each other in this fallen world. Again, God’s love gives everyone a choice to surrender to Him. Therefore, upon death, we Believers ascend to His Heaven. . . a place absent of sin and death that is active in this fallen environment. This is why our temporal life ends.

 God does not intend or promise that we live here in this fallen creation forever. Temporal death is a gift to Believers. God promises eternal life with Him because we surrender to Him by faith (John 3:16). God calls to us through this chaos and says, “Turn to Me!” (Isaiah 45:22) for life and eternal life.

Everything is fallen in this creation including the biology that surrounds us, with which we struggle every day. We know that there is a constant battle in the cells of every living thing to stay alive in the midst of a fallen world that is at war with itself. This is why Paul wrote 2000 years ago that the whole creation moans and seeks to be released from this fallen environment (Romans 18:19ff).

**God’s Operational Plan in a Fallen Environment**

God created us in His image (Genesis 1: 26) to live the life He has planned for us (Ephesians 2:10). That does not mean in His physical image but in His Spiritual image. To overcome this fallen world, God *spiritually wired* us to have a loving relationship with Him and each other. We have to choose to access this *spiritual wiring* by surrendering our will to His. At the same time, we have a spiritual choice to have a relationship with God’s enemies (namely Satan).

**Where does this “choice for love” start?**

Our choices are highlighted in the beginning with Adam and Eve. From childhood, we are familiar with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden where God provided all their needs. Adam and Eve represent all of us. God had plans for Adam and Eve which was not to eat from the *Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. God specifically told Adam (giving him a choice) not to eat from this tree, and, if he did, Adam would die (Genesis 2:17). We all know Adam and Eve did choose to eat from the *forbidden tree*, and their eyes were opened to the world of rebellion and sin (Genesis 3). Adam and Eve did not physically die right away. In fact, Adam lived to be 930 years old. The most meaningful death came to Adam and Eve when they were separated from God and removed from the Garden of Eden. God said He did this so they would not eat from the T*ree of Life* and live forever (Genesis 3:22-24).

 **Wait, is not that what God wants us to do, live forever?**

 **Yes, but not in a fallen state, separated from Him for an**

 **eternity! Separation from God is death.**

Okay, from this point, in the account of the Fall of man, is the key eternal lesson that is often overlooked. This is where God’s love is demonstrated. Despite their rebellion, God provided an opportunity for Adam and Eve, for all of us, to choose to surrender to Him and receive the gift of the T*ree of Life* and live forever with Him in Heaven.

**How so?**

God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden containing the *Tree of Life*, so, they, in their fallen state, would not eat from the *Tree of Life* and live forever in their fallen state separated from Him. Instead, God removed them from the Garden and gave them a choice to overcome their sin nature, by humbling and surrendering their heart and will to Him. Thus, receiving God’s indwelling Spirit. Once God saw they had surrendered to Him, His Spirit came into their lives so they could live the life He originally planned for them. However, they would still physically die one day because they had sinned (Romans 6:23).

7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.**' Revelation 2:7** (NAU)

**God is an Equal Opportunity Savior**

All people have the same choice as Adam and Eve. Believers have made their surrender to the Lord. With His Spirit operating inside our hearts, we strive to live the life God has planned.

**So, to be clear. . . why do we die and leave this temporal fallen world?**

This question goes to the heart of the reasons for our creation.

I see that God created us so we can experience love. . .

 . . . the greatest gift. Life without love is no life at all.

Remember, God is love, and we are created in His image. Love is a choice upon which all people can choose to join God. Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13).

**I Want to be Repetitive!**

Going back to the account of the Fall (Genesis 3), God’s love removed Adam and Eve from the Garden and the *Tree of Life* lest they eat from it and live forever in their sinful fallen state. So, God purposed that Adam and Eve physically die leaving this fallen environment behind but with a choice of a salvation by faith leading to eternal life with Him.

Therefore, God made it possible for Adam and Eve, and for all of us, to be united with him by faith and be accepted into His Heaven full of love and life separating ourselves from the fallen world of sin and death forever. God does not want us to eat from the tree of life in our fallen state. First, God calls us to humble ourselves to Him in order to access the tree of life which is availed to us through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the Cross.

**Love-Choice in The Fall**

In context, love is a choice to be chosen in the face of a fallen world. For there to be a choice for love, there must be a choice opposite of love. It is easy to choose to love someone when we are surrounded by wealth and health. Love is easy to extend when there isn’t any opposition. This is when love is a convenience. However, Godly love is chosen when there is opposition, when evil abounds, when there are other choices. Love would not be the love we know if it were not a choice in the face of evil. God’s love reached-out to Adam and Eve despite their rebellion and offered them restoration by faith. We see their relationship restored in Genesis 4:25 when Eve praises the Lord for giving her another son.

**When God created the world, He created “free will choice”.**

Remember, from the beginning, Adam was given a choice in Genesis 2:17. This means God built into the creation all the bad things that can happen to us. He built into our minds the ability to choose not to live the life He has planned for us. By this “choice” installed in the creation, every kind of evil and sin is unleashed for us to choose and be affected. Therefore, we live in a fallen environment. The whole creation calls to be set free (Romans 8:18ff).

**Agape Love in a Free Will Choice World**

*Agape* love is the powerful choice for us to choose in the midst of this *fallenness*. God wants us to freely choose Him in the face of other options. *Agape love* is unconditional love. This is the love that saved the world (John 3:16). The atonement for sin represented at the Cross was freely given in the face of rebellion. God’s application of *agape* (unconditional love) is also sacrificial love.

**Sin and Death Operational**

In this fallen world we experience the operation of sin and death all around us. It is in this environment that God calls us to come to Him. This is the price for having “free will choice.” This “price-choice” provides for us the “choice” for victory in God for eternal life with Him. . .over an eternal life choice for sin and death separated from God.

Always remember that God made love a choice in a fallen environment. This is why verses like Romans 10:13 are so powerful. When we call upon God, we are calling for His love, through the sleeting of sin and death. . . for God is love (1 John 4:8). There is only one power greater than the power of sin and death that can set us free. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:2 NAS)

13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. **Romans 10:13** (CSB17)

**What Kind of Love?**

There are three primary kinds of love in the Bible: p*hiladelphia* or brotherly love, e*ros* love (romantic/physical) and then there is *agape* love. *Agape* love is the love a father has for his children and God has for all of us. Rebellious or not, God extends His *agape (unconditional)* love to us. We see this at the Cross of Jesus when He says, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). The love of the Cross is unconditional and sacrificial.

 When a father raises his children, in time, there are disappointments due to a child’s disruptive behavior. However, parents keep on loving their children in spite of their bad behavior. This is “free will choice”.

**The power of *agape* love overrides the pain and hardship of the disruption and rebellion. This agape-sacrifice of self brings forgiveness and restoration.**

1 Corinthians 13 proclaims that a person can have great gifts, have knowledge and be charitable, but, if they do not have love (agape), it profits them nothing. The passage continues to say that love is patient, kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, or act unbecomingly seeking its own, love is not provoked, nor takes into account a wrong suffered, and does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. **Love never fails**; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away (1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

1 Corinthians 13 describes God. God’s love is perfect and never fails. Always remember that God is love (1 John 4:8). And we are created in His image. This means, we too are to be vessels of love. Remember, this is why God created us. God tells us that love is the greatest of all gifts.

**Again, I see this is the reason God created us. . .**

**to experience love. . . the greatest gift.**

Jesus was confronted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Satan offered to give Jesus the whole world, if He would worship him. None of the things Satan offered Jesus contained love. We, like Jesus, have all been tested, as Jesus was in the wilderness. Contrary to Jesus, we all failed. In recognition of our failing, we Believers are called by God to accept His grace gift of salvation in our hearts. We then entered into God’s life-plan that He has planned for us (Ephesians 2:10) from the foundation of the world.

**Can we be Materially Successful without God?**

 God allows us to be materially successful in life without Him. But then, there is the love of God we would not be able to extend to others. I ask you a question: Would you want to be a person who was highly successful in life without God’s *agape* love? This is the reason God created us in His image, to *contain, experience and share* His greatest gift of love.

God does not promise, nor intend, for our temporal lives to survive. God calls for us to spiritually endure, exercising our “free will choice” for Him, in the midst of this fallen world. God does promise that His love saves us and endures within us transcending to the next life.

**The reality is – God’s love in the only thing with which we leave this world. We enter Heaven with God’s love.**

John 3:16 begins with “God so loved the world” and ends with “eternal life”. Love = Eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

The word “*belief”* connects the two ends of this verse. We see the *unique gift* of His incarnation (described as ‘His Son’) connect to “*eternal life*” by “*belief*.” Jesus went to the Cross to pay the price for our sins, so we will not have to pay that price (substitutionary atonement).

It is important for us to see that God came and experienced physical death and He has planned that we all do the same. God does not require of us something that He has not done. And, like God’s incarnation, as Jesus Christ that led to his temporal death, we Believers will also die, and like Him, we will rise to an eternal life. In our physical death, the first things will have passed away.

Revelation 21:4 (NAU) and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

 **A Psalm of David - 23**

 1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

 3 He restoreth my soul:

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

 4 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.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (KJV)

**AMEN**