***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**

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

 I preached this sermon on September 27th 2020, for the second time. I reformatted the text to apply to a general audience from one that I had recently presented at the funeral service of one of the Lord’s Saints. 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 with a senior citizen population. Round Top’s population is only 90 but grows on the weekend with 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. The whole community ached for the loss of life and was seeking thoughts and words to cope with the reality of temporal life’s end.

 At the time I wrote the sermon, my wife, Renee, was in the process of entering the Lord’s hands. Renee died on September 29, 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. I noted previously that I had bladder cancer in 2015. It took almost two years for me to be treated and feel that I was on the road to remission. Many thought that Renee and I had suffered too much with her being diagnosed with cancer after my own battle. They could not understand why we both contracted a deadly disease. We never lived a lifestyle lending to cancer. This is where knowing God and His Word sustains us beyond human understanding.

The question often asked, “Why did God create us in the first place”? I mean, this world is a tough place. Life is fragile and hard to sustain in this fallen environment. So, why would God create life? This question goes to the heart of who God is. 1 John 4:8 tells us that God is love, and, in Genesis 1:26-27, we are told that God created us in His image. The logical conclusion is that since we are created in the image of God and He is love then we, too, are to be love. That is. . .our lives are created to experience love. Love is the greatest gift (1 Corinthians 13:13). God desires for us to experience love but to achieve the experience of love we have to humble ourselves to Him. God gave us the free-will-choice of love. Love is a choice or it would not be love. Love only exists in a fallen world of choices.

Jesus was asked by the religious lawyer how to gain eternal life. Most Christians know that Jesus turned and said, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” (Matthew 22:37) In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus replied to the lawyer, “What is written in the Law”? Then the lawyer quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (“But you shall love your neighbor as yourself”). We all know that John 3:16 proclaims that the catalyst for God’s incarnation was love. “For God so loved the world. . .”

Therefore, the simple and complete answer to the question “Why did God create us?” is to give us the opportunity to experience love, the greatest gift from the nature of God. To experience love makes life worth living even in a fallen world.

We Believers know God’s will for our lives is to be with Him for an eternity and not stuck in a fallen world for an eternity void of His love. We Christians know that we are not protected from the effects of being in the current fallen environment of sin and death. We can count on God’s gift of love to be offered to us in order that we can maintain an internal peace through the midst of adversity. In this message, we will talk about the key to understanding why God allows pain, suffering and death. Remember that God’s love is a choice and His love is eternal in contrast to this temporal fallen world. And, I pray, people understand that there is also an eternal world without God’s love. Remember, as you read this message, that without God’s love being a choice over and through this fallen world, love is not love. 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 the fallen environment.

 So, in September of 2020, I, once again, leaned on the Lord to write a message that would address the community at-large. Many were witnessing the passing of a loved one. God built into us the longing to hold onto this life. We do not easily want to give-up this earthly life. 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 death?” Why does a loving God allow pain and suffering? I am also repetitive in this sermon to emphasize specific understandings. I opened the sermon with the prayer outline Jesus gave us in Matthew 6.

**Text of Sermon**

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

 All join and say. . .

 **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

 **Matthew 6:9-13** (KJV)

As of late, we have lives passing before us and more to come. 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.

**Romans 8:35-39**

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.

 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**

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 desired plans for our lives were made at the beginning of time. Believer’s 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 did 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, once we have become Believers, 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**

 Due to Believer’s surrendering to the Lord, our goal is to walk in the plans God has for our lives (Ephesians 2:10) that He prepared beforehand. To achieve His plans, God provides spiritual gifts or attributes. These are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

 Therefore, our lives produce “good” fruit. We become loving fathers/ mothers, husbands/wives, sons/daughters and a friend to many. Therefore, all the world sees how these gifted attributes (fruits of the Spirit) of God work in our lives and provide a witness that His Holy Spirit directs our hearts and minds.

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**

 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**

 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 Temporal Life Ends and Eternal Life Begins**

Why do our temporal lives end? 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 giving us free-will choice. Never forget that from the point of the Fall of Adam and Eve, God provided a plan for us not to be stuck 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 Love is a choice. Our lives are intended, by God, to emanate His love. In short, our temporal life ends 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 presence (Luke 23:43).

 God does not promise that we live here in this fallen creation forever - thank goodness. Temporal death is a gift so that we do not stay here in this fallen world. 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 and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:22).

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 8:18ff).

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. We are spiritually wired to have a loving relationship with God and each other. Since God is love (1 John 4:8) and we are created in His image – we too are to be a being of love. 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? 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 see here that God did not create robots. God wants us to experience free-will-choice to respond to Him with love. We all know Adam and Eve did not respond correctly and chose 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 real 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 *Tree 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!**

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 provides an opportunity for Adam and Eve, for all of us, to choose to surrender to Him and receive the gift of the *Tree of Life* and live forever with Him in heaven. 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 surrendering to Him, thus, receiving God’s 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. They then, with God’s Spirit dwelling in them, were empowered to overcome the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2). This does not mean they were sinless. However, they gained to opportunity to mature in the life-plan God had for them. Their core motive for life was good and not bent toward evil. Remember, the Believer’s nature is to practice the truth of God and bring their deeds to the Light (John 3:19-21).

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**

We all have this same choice as Adam and Eve. Believers have made their surrender to the Lord and strive to live the life God has planned for them now and then join Him in His heaven for an eternity. Paul details that Believers will be transformed from the perishable to the imperishable.

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. **1 Corinthians 15:53**

So, why do we die and leave this temporal fallen world? We physically die to be with the Lord, separated from the fallen world of sin and death.

Remember, God is love, and love (God) is a choice upon which all people should call. Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13).

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. For love to exist, there must be a choice opposite from love. It is easy to choose to love someone when we are surrounded by wealth and health. Love is easy to extend and accept 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 through the fallenness of people.

When God created the world, He created “free-will choice”. This means He 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. The whole creation calls to be set free (Romans 8:18ff). This is why *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. So, in this fallen world, we have death all around us, but God calls us to come to Him. This is the price for having “free-will choice”, but it provides for us the “choice” for victory in God for eternal life. Always remember that God made love a choice. This is why verses like Romans 10:13 are so powerful.

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

When we call upon God, we are calling for His love to guide our lives through the darkness of this fallen world, for God is love (1 John 4:8).

I ask the question. . . “Do you want to be a robot and never experience the choice for love?” Would you want to miss the nature of love and its elation of the heart in exchange for a pain-free life? A robot never knows the feeling of good and accomplishment. Robots do not get sick. They do not have Thanksgiving or Christmas celebrations. Robots do not know about free-will-choice or commitment. Robots are programed to function mathematical processes based upon the data entered into them. Robots just process data until they break and then are replaced by a new model.

There are three primary kinds of love in the Bible: *philadelphia* or brotherly love, *eros* 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* 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). When a father raises his children, there are disappointments due to a child’s disruptive behavior. However, parents keep loving their children despite their bad behavior. This is “free-will choice”. The power of *agape* love overrides the pain and hardship of the disruption of sin and death.

1 Corinthians 13 proclaims that a person can have great gifts, have knowledge and be charitable, but, if they do not have love, 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). This passage describes God. God’s love is perfect and never fails. 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.

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 accepted God’s grace gift of salvation in our hearts to overcome the power of sin and death. We then entered into God’s life-plan that He has planned for us (Ephesians 2:10). Remember there is only one power greater than the power of sin and death that can set us free.

**Romans 8:1** Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

**Life Without Love**

 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’s love empowers us to overcome this fallen world and follow the Lord’s commands. In fact, people who claim to love God but do not follow His commands are liars and the truth is not in them (1 John 1:6, 2:4).

Due to God’s love for us. . . He does not promise or desire for our temporal lives to survive. In fact, He calls for our temporal lives to end. God calls for us to endure, exercising our “free-will choice” for Him, in the midst of this fallen world (John 3:16). God does promise that His enduring eternal love saves those who have surrendered to Him.

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.

This verse proclaims God’s “gift” of the Incarnation in Jesus who went to the Cross to pay the price for our sins so we will not have to pay that price and proclaims our surrendering “faith”. God came and died, and He has planned that we all do the same. God does not require us to do something He has not done. Jesus Christ died and rose from the tomb, and we Believers will also die to rise to an eternal life.

**Revelation 21:4** 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**