

# THE MESSAGE OF LIFE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

by  
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## **Come and See**

A most troubling feature of Christendom is that it lacks consensus in answering the question: “What must I do to go to heaven?” Ask this of any ten who call on the name of Christ and be prepared to hear at least eleven answers. Perhaps, Christendom is too broad a category, but Bible-believing evangelical Protestants evidence the same disparity. Few evangelicals are truly comfortable with the key passages defining the message of life:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life (John 6:47).*

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30–31).<sup>1</sup>*

Do these passages lack anything? Does John seem to omit any content that one must believe in order to receive eternal life?

All too often Christians tend to avoid passages that make them uncomfortable. Thus, any sense that these key statements in John are not complete leads to shunning them, even though John’s Gospel presents itself as the message, which gives life. A safer course is to admit that John contains some surprises. Nathanael initially rejected Philip’s statement that the Messiah came from

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from the NKJV, *New King James Version* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982).

Nazareth (John 1:45),<sup>2</sup> so he challenged, *Can any good thing come from Nazareth?* Philip's response is also appropriate for those who may wonder if John's message needs more content: *Come and see* (John 1:46). Perhaps, contemporary evangelicals should *come and see*, before concluding that John's message is incomplete.

The purpose statement in John 20:30–31 defines John's message of life.

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name* (John 20:30–31).

Immediately, a question arises: Why does John say *many other signs*? The last time he used the word *sign* is in chapter 12.<sup>3</sup> It would be quite natural for him to refer to *many signs*, but the fact that he refrains from using the word *signs* in chapters 13–19 makes *many other signs* somewhat unexpected.<sup>4</sup>

### Defining John's Signs

Most expositors recognize seven signs in John:<sup>5</sup>

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|---|-----------|
| 1. Turning water into wine                  | (2:1–12)  |
| 2. Healing a nobleman's son from a distance | (4:46–54) |
| 3. Healing at Bethesda                      | (5:1–15)  |
| 4. Feeding the 5000                         | (6:1–14)  |

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<sup>2</sup> Imagine someone asking, "Where is that Rolls Royce *from*?" He may want to know (1) the location of the factory from which it originated or (2) the name of the state on its license plate. *From Nazareth* ("apo Nazaret") refers to Jesus' residence, not His birthplace. Despite his misunderstanding, Philip was willing to *come and see*.

<sup>3</sup> *Sēmeion* ("sign") appears in John 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30.

<sup>4</sup> Does he refer to the signs of verse 31? Such an anticipatory use of *other* would be a bit abrupt.

<sup>5</sup> Although Jesus performs signs prior to Cana of Galilee (John 1:28, 35, and 47), John begins counting the signs chosen for his gospel account in John 2:11, *This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana*.

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|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 5. Walking on the water     | (6:15–21) |
| 6. Healing a man born blind | (9:1–7)   |
| 7. Raising Lazarus          | (11:1–44) |

John 2:18–22 shows that an eighth sign involves His resurrection.

*So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,<sup>6</sup> and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*

In one sense, viewing the eighth sign as the resurrection is true, but does Jesus say more? Limiting the eighth sign to the resurrection ignores a vital part (elided below) of verses 18–19:

*So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” Jesus answered and said to them, “. . . in three days I will raise it [this temple] up.”*

Jesus does not merely speak of His resurrection. He also referred to the crucifixion directly:

*So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” Jesus answered and said to them, “**Destroy this temple**, and in three days I will raise it up.”*

Someone may object saying, “The crucifixion cannot be part of the eighth sign, because His audience did not regard the destruction of the temple as miraculous. They only treat raising up the temple in three days as a sign. *Then the Jews said, “This temple*

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<sup>6</sup> A better translation is: “This temple [*naos*] has been built forty-six years.” Cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 40–43. The *naos* (the holy of holies and holy place) was completed in 18/17 B.C., so A.D. 29/30 would be its forty-sixth year. Another word, *hieron*, refers to the temple precincts.

*[naos] has been built forty-six years,<sup>7</sup> and will You raise it up in three days?"* Even though they only understood the second part of the statement as a sign, this does not preclude the reference to the cross from being an integral part of the sign.

These Judeans, who question Jesus in verse twenty, were quite aware of the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem. In that light, they would not regard a destruction of Herod's temple as miraculous, though it must have seemed unlikely. They construed Jesus' words as idle speculation about the future. However, when Titus actually destroyed the temple in A.D. 70, who could deny that God's hand of judgment was upon the nation? In other words, Jesus and His listeners would regard any destruction of the temple as a sign from God, but His audience did not realize the truth of Matthew 12:6: *Yet I say to you that in this place there is One [that is, Christ, who is] greater than the temple.*

Just as it is true that the A.D. 70 destruction signaled God's judgment upon the nation for rejecting their Messiah (Luke 13:34-35), it is also true that the crucifixion of the Messiah was part of the sign proving Jesus' authority to cleanse the temple. Even so, the idea that killing Jesus could relate to a sign from God never occurred to the rulers: How could they possibly play a role in God bringing a sign against the nation of Israel?

*But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).*

Amazingly, Jesus uses a second-person imperative, *[You] destroy this temple. . . .* It was not a foreign power that would initiate the destruction of this temple: The Judean leaders themselves ultimately delivered Jesus up to the Romans and insisted upon His crucifixion. The very fact that the crucifixion occurred was indeed a great miracle, for neither the religious leaders nor Satan sought to validate Jesus as the Christ, but

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<sup>7</sup> See the immediately preceding note.

unwittingly they participated in fulfilling God’s plan. Although the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was a sign that verified Jesus’ right to cleanse the temple, recognition of it as a sign only came after the resurrection.

<i>The Cross</i>	<i>The Resurrection</i>
Neither were seen as signs until Jesus’ resurrection	Both were seen as signs after Jesus’ resurrection

John tells of this delayed recognition:

*Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said **this** to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*

When Jesus said **this** [“*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*”], neither the Judean religious leaders nor the disciples perceived the cross-and-resurrection as a sign demonstrating His authority to cleanse the temple. After the resurrection His disciples remembered **this**. Only then did they believe **this truth**. Were the eleven still unbelievers facing the Lake of Fire until after Christ’s resurrection? Absolutely not!

### **When Did the Eleven Receive Life?**

Does the Gospel of John make it clear that the eleven possessed eternal life before they believed in the cross-and-resurrection? When Peter protested against Jesus washing his feet, Christ warned, *If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me* (John 13:8). Contextually, the idea of having no part with Christ is not that Peter lacked eternal life, but that he lacked rewardability.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A key line of evidence for this is in verses 10–11. Jesus pronounces the eleven as bathed and clean, while declaring Judas unclean. It is not that Peter was unbathed and unclean until verse 9. Instead, the issue is that his feet remained unwashed. Having *no part with Me* deals with loss of rewards, not with damnation to the Lake of Fire.

Peter accepted Jesus' rebuke, but inferred that more is better than less: *Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!* Jesus corrected him: The eleven already possessed eternal life through simple faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, He said in verse 10, *He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is **completely clean**; and you (plural) are **clean**, but not all of you (plural).* Jesus knew Judas was an unbeliever and thus unclean. Therefore, He did not say that they were all clean: *For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You (plural) are not all clean"* (John 13:11).

The conclusion is inescapable, eleven of the twelve disciples already were believers who possessed eternal life. On that Passover night,<sup>9</sup> Judas left the room and the building: *Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night* (John 13:30). Leaving the room on this night is significant. On the original Passover, no one was to leave their house, because the angel of death would pass over. Thus, not only was it unexpected for Judas to leave during the Passover, but it was also unlikely for anyone to join a Passover celebration once it had commenced. No reason exists for surmising that any others left.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 81–90, shows that Judeans and Galileans differed by one day in observing Passover. Jesus and His disciples ate it the night before His death (on the Galilean timetable), but His crucifixion occurred while Judeans slaughtered Passover lambs. Those seeking Jesus' death did not realize that they slaughtered the Lamb of God at Passover. What greater sign could possibly verify Jesus' right to cleanse His Father's temple (John 2:18–19)?

<sup>10</sup> The Passover was a night when few were likely to come and go. Other than Judas, everyone who heard John 13:10 also heard John 15:3. The reason for not judging Judas harshly for leaving the room is two-fold. The eleven took John 13:27 in a positive light (cf. verses 28–29). They thought that Jesus had sent Judas on an errand. Neither tradition nor Jesus' prior teaching had led them to treat leaving the room as a crime. Even more importantly, John 18:1 indicates that Jesus and His disciples left the room and went to the Garden. John does not judge Judas for leaving the room on Passover night (but for betraying Christ). The

After Judas left, Jesus pronounced, *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you* (John 15:3). Jesus does not indicate that any unclean person was still present. The eleven were clean because of the word He spoke, that is, they believed His message of life. They were clean because they believed the message that gives life. They were already possessors of everlasting life.

However, it was not until after Jesus' resurrection that the eleven believed the eighth sign: His death and resurrection. They possessed everlasting life prior to believing that His crucifixion would culminate in resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

*Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed<sup>12</sup> the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said* (John 2:22).

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religious leaders may have chosen this night (in part) because fewer Galilean pilgrims would wander about Jerusalem than on earlier nights.

<sup>11</sup> Neither Jesus nor John deprecate what some like to label “mere sign faith.” The eleven later believed the eighth sign (the cross and resurrection) due to seeing this sign: *Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said* (John 2:22). Theologians rightly accept the “sign faith” of verse, but ridicule it in verse 23: *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.* John 2:23 does not question the legitimacy of their faith, but recognizes that new believers have not yet grown into trustworthiness. John 2:23–3:36 contrasts the trustworthiness of John the Baptist fearlessly proclaiming Christ (John 3:22ff) with untrustworthy new believers that hid in darkness (like Nicodemus). Although Nicodemus came to faith that night, it was not until John 19 that Jesus could entrust him with ministry. Zane C. Hodges, “Problem Passages in the Gospel of John—Part 4: Coming to the Light: John 3:20–21,” *BSac* 135 (October–December 1978): 314–22, offers good evidence (from verse 21) that Nicodemus believed the message of life that night.

<sup>12</sup> John 15:3 indicate that the eleven were clean prior to Christ's resurrection. They had already believed the message of life. However,

John 20:27–29 warns Thomas (who already believed Christ’s message of life) not to disbelieve that the crucified Christ was now resurrected. In verses 24–25, Thomas is an example of an unbelieving believer. He believed salvific truth and so he possessed eternal life, but rejected the resurrection as the culmination of Jesus’ crucifixion. In verse 28, he became a believing believer. He was already regenerate, but the eighth sign now persuaded Thomas that Messiah’s death was not eternal. Verse 29 indicates that some had already believed in His resurrection before seeing the resurrected Christ.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is safe to conclude that (prior to Christ’s resurrection), even people who did not comprehend Jesus’ cross-and-resurrection received eternal life through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Taking God at His word, they believed such promises as John 5:24 or 6:47:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life (John 6:47).*

The essential message of life (before Christ’s resurrection) was that Jesus Christ gives eternal life to anyone who became persuaded that He has given them eternal life.<sup>14</sup>

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they only understood and believed His reference to the destruction of the temple (His body) and the resurrection until after Christ’s resurrection.

<sup>13</sup> The Gospels do not dwell on this point, but focus on those who believed in His resurrection from the dead when they recognized Christ. However, verse 29 indicates that some had already believed in His resurrection from the dead without first seeing the resurrected Christ.

<sup>14</sup> The present author believes in the sufficiency of this message before and after Christ’s resurrection. Thus far, the article has only argued for it being sufficient prior to the cross. See the remainder of the article concerning its validity today.

## Understanding John 20:30–31

The passage contains both initial and ultimate purposes.

*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written (initial purpose) **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and (ultimate purpose) that believing you may have life in His name** (John 20:30–31).*

John expresses his ultimate purpose for writing as:

*. . . these are written **that . . . you may have life in His name.***

It is bold for John to claim that his message is the dividing line between death and life. If his readers believe the content of John 20:31, they have eternal life. If, in this life, they never believe it, they are under a death sentence. John's Gospel is designed to give life to those who do not possess it. Unless John gives everything necessary for a person to receive eternal life, his book would be a failure. As inerrant Scripture, who would assert that he fails? Therefore, evangelicals should carefully examine what John treats as the content of this message of life. If what John says differs from what modern evangelicals preach, it is time to bring the modern message into conformity with the Gospel of John.

Again, the conclusion is inescapable: John asserts that believing *that Jesus is the Christ,*<sup>15</sup> *the Son of God* is sufficient to give *life in His name*. Someone may object: "There is a difference between saying that everyone who has eternal life believes *X* and

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<sup>15</sup> Some expositors may be tempted to construe the Greek of John 20:31 as: "that the Christ is Jesus." This would make *Christ* the subject and *Jesus* the predicate nominative. The correct understanding is believe: *that Jesus is the Christ*, with *Jesus* as subject and *Christ* as predicate nominative, as John 11:27 establishes. It says, *I believe that You are the Christ*. The form of the verb is *ei* ("you are," second person singular) from *eimi* ("to be"). This means that *su* ("you") is the subject, not the predicate nominative. Certainly, the culminating statement of John 20:31 parallels Mary's climactic statement in John 11:27. Thus, John's purpose remains for his readers to believe *that Jesus is the Christ*.

saying that believing *X* alone is sufficient to give eternal life.” Precisely! It is our contention that John affirms both of the following propositions:<sup>16</sup>

- **Everyone who has eternal life** *believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and*
- **everyone who** *believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, has eternal life.*

Most evangelicals recognize that John 20:31 affirms the former statement, but many may question the second. The question is: Does the Apostle John accept the second? Absolutely! 1 John 5:1a affirms it also:

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*

John does not say that 99% of those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are born again. He asserts that 100% of the people who believe this content are regenerate.

However, it is not just 1 John 5:1a that makes this point. John 20:31 does as well. Specifically, John’s Gospel expresses its purpose in terms of giving eternal life to those who lack it. He says to those who do not have eternal life: “You will have life, when you believe that Jesus is the Christ.” John regarded this as a sufficient message for receiving eternal life.

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<sup>16</sup> Two provisos are appropriate: 1. These statements refer to the time period after Christ’s ministry began, because the content which gave eternal life prior to that point did not name Jesus as the one who is God’s provision for eternal life. 2. Believing *that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God* only gives life to one who understands that John means that Christ gives eternal life to all believers. It would be insufficient to take it as merely affirming that Jesus is His first name and Christ is his surname.

### Defining Terms in John 11:25–27

What does it mean to *believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*? A definition of terms appears in John 11:25–27. Jesus received word that Lazarus, His friend, was sick (John 11:1–3). *So, when He heard that he was sick, Jesus stayed two more days in the place where He was* (verse 6). Verse 17 says, *So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days*. It appears that Jesus was at least one day’s journey away from Bethany.<sup>17</sup> The messenger who was sent to inform Jesus probably returned upon telling Him about Lazarus, so Jesus undoubtedly arrived two days after the messenger. A displeased Martha greeted Him with, *Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died* (11:21). She added, *But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You* (11:22). She wanted Him to pray at once to the Father to raise Lazarus. When Jesus assured her, *Your brother will rise again*, she thought that He spoke of the distant future: *I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day* (11:23). She wanted Jesus to pray for the Father to raise him at that moment.

However, Jesus corrected her theology. He did not need to pray for the Father to raise Lazarus, because Jesus Himself is the one who resurrects.

*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”* (John 11:25–27).

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<sup>17</sup> Assume that a messenger traveled for one day to reach Jesus, who remained there two more days before making a one-day trip to Bethany. Probably, the messenger returned a couple of days before Jesus came. Martha was not happy about this delay.

He starts with two theses:

*I am the resurrection*

*and*

*[I am] the life.*

Then, He amplifies both:

*I am the resurrection:*

*He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.*

*and*

*[I am] the life:*

*whoever lives and believes in Me shall not die unto eternity.*<sup>18</sup>

*Do you believe [all of] this?*<sup>19</sup> *Yes, Lord.*

Jesus explains what He means by saying *I am the resurrection*: He promises that He will resurrect all who believe in Him. Then, He explains the meaning of *I am the life*: He grants eternal life to all believers. He asked Martha if she believed all of this. Her answer, *Yes, Lord*, is sufficient. She went on, putting that

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<sup>18</sup> The rendering “shall not die unto eternity” is more literal than “shall never die.” Similarly, Revelation 20:5–6 says, *But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.* This passage distinguishes physical death from the second death. John 11:26 affirms that believers will not face the second death.

<sup>19</sup> The paraphrase *[all of] this* derives from the use of the neuter form *touto* for *this*. Greek uses neuter forms of *this* under two circumstances: (1) when a neuter word (in context) is the referent or (2) when it has a multiple-word antecedent. The latter applies, since no other neuter words appear. Jesus asks her if she believes all of the words in the heavy border: *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”*

statement into her own words: *I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world* (11:27). The question becomes: How is Martha's response a restatement of Jesus' discourse on the *resurrection and the life*?

To answer this question, we should look in the Old Testament. Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant requires the resurrection of Old Testament saints. Several passages in Genesis promise land to a patriarch and to his seed forever.

*The land which you see I give to you [Abraham] and your descendants forever* (Genesis 13:15).

*Also I give to you [Abraham] and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession* (Genesis 17:8).

*To you [Isaac] and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father* (Genesis 26:3).

*I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you [Jacob] and your descendants* (Genesis 28:13).

*The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you [Jacob]; and to your descendants after you I give this land* (Genesis 35:12).

God did not merely promise that Abraham's lineage would possess the land forever. Consider Abraham's lineage from a generational point of view: Abraham is Generation<sub>1</sub>, Isaac is Generation<sub>2</sub>, Jacob is Generation<sub>3</sub>, the rest of the generations are Generation<sub>Z</sub>.

God's promise to Abraham made guarantees to Generations<sub>1–Z</sub>.

God's promise to Isaac made guarantees to Generations<sub>2–Z</sub>.

God's promise to Jacob made guarantees to Generations<sub>3–Z</sub>.

In the course of time Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died. Due to the nature of God's promise to give the land forever to each of

them, God's obligation to them continues beyond their deaths. Through the Abrahamic Covenant God obligated Himself to resurrect them and grant them eternal life.

Is it any wonder that Abraham concluded *that God was able to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense* (Hebrews 11:19)? Likewise, Joseph's requirement that his bones not be left in Egypt testifies to his belief that God would resurrect him so that he could live in the Promised Land: *By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones* (Hebrews 11:22). Actually, no Old Testament believer lived to see God's millennial fulfillment of His covenanted promises: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* (Hebrews 11:13). Apart from resurrection and eternal life no Old Testament believer could live in the yet-future messianic Kingdom.

Paul links Israel's hope to resurrection:

*And now I stand and am judged for **the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers**. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. **For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead*** (Acts 26:6–8)?

The hope of Israel refers to the future fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. That hope involves resurrection. Therefore, Paul highlights the contradictory nature of the charges against him. Logically, the accusations require both affirming and denying the resurrection. The self-contradiction itself refutes the position of any Israelite who condemned Paul's message while clinging to a fulfillment of God's promises to give the land to Abraham and his seed forever.

Why is it important to note that the Old Testament believers possessed eternal life and the promise of resurrection? They possessed eternal life even though their sin penalty was not yet paid on Calvary. In other words, prior payment of the sin penalty is not requisite to either receiving eternal life or receiving the promise of resurrection. John expresses his message in terms of regeneration and receiving eternal life, not the forgiveness of sins. John deals with the fundamental problem of the fall: death. A reading of Genesis 3 shows that man is fundamentally under a death curse. The word *sin* does not occur in Genesis 3, although it is quite correct for Romans 5 to refer to the act that plunged the human race into death as Adam's sin. Even so, John focuses on the correction of the fundamental problem: death.<sup>20</sup>

Forgiveness of sin is a wonderful benefit of the cross. Believers enjoy the benefits of forgiveness that came through the cross and the New Covenant. Likewise, John relates the cross-and-resurrection of Christ to the message of life in a careful and deliberate manner.

In John 11:27 Martha affirmed her belief that Christ, God's Son, will resurrect all believers and that He gives eternal life to them. John's message of life is just that simple: Everyone who believes that Christ gives them eternal life not only receives that gift, but will also receive resurrection life. This is John's message of life, even before the eighth sign, the cross-and-resurrection. Therefore, pre-cross believers possessed eternal life, just as surely as post-cross believers do.

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<sup>20</sup> 1 John 2:2 says that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of believers and for the sins of the whole world. However, it does not specify the content that one needs to believe in order to receive eternal life. Though the sin issue is important, John does not present it as the fundamental one facing the unbeliever. Not even John 16:9 does that. The Holy Spirit uses the sin issue in convicting the world, but unbelief in Christ is the fundamental problem.

## **The Cross-and-resurrection in Today's Message of Life**

John indicates that the cross-and-resurrection, the eighth sign, is sufficient to cause one to believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son, gives him eternal life and will resurrect him.<sup>21</sup> *These signs [including His cross-and-resurrection] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing that you may have life in His name.* Now, if the cross-and-resurrection are sufficient to cause one to believe the message of life, then John has not confused believing the cross-and-resurrection with believing God's promise of eternal life. The following visual may help.

Sign 1 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Sign 2 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Sign 3 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Sign 4 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Sign 5 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Sign 6 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Sign 7 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>28</sup>

Sign 8 was written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>29</sup>

The following inference derives from this:

Sign 1 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 1.

Sign 2 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 2.

Sign 3 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 3.

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<sup>21</sup> *These [signs, including the cross and resurrection] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).*

<sup>22</sup> Sign 1 is: turning water into wine (2:1–12).

<sup>23</sup> Sign 2 is: healing a nobleman's son from a distance (4:46–54).

<sup>24</sup> Sign 3 is: the healing at Bethsaida (5:1–15).

<sup>25</sup> Sign 4 is: feeding the 5000 (6:1–14).

<sup>26</sup> Sign 5 is: walking on the water (6:15–21).

<sup>27</sup> Sign 6 is: healing a man born blind (9:1–7).

<sup>28</sup> Sign 7 is: raising Lazarus (11:1–44).

<sup>29</sup> Sign 8 is: Jesus' cross and resurrection.

Sign 4 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 4.  
Sign 5 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 5.  
Sign 6 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 6.  
Sign 7 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 7.  
Sign 8 was not written that you may merely believe Sign 8.

Obviously, John does not say, “These signs were written that you may believe these signs.” He does not offer such a circular message.

John keeps the signs distinct from the message of life, so evangelicals must not confuse them either. John does not set forth the sign of the cross-and-resurrection as the message that one must believe in order to receive eternal life. In other words, even after the cross-and-resurrection, John’s message remains the same as in John 5:24 and 6:47.

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life (John 6:47).*

This message is consistent with the fact that Old Testament believers possessed eternal life, even though they died before the cross paid their penalty of sin. The gift of eternal life came to those people in Old Testament times that believed in the coming One who gives eternal life and would resurrect them in the future. Although as Hebrews 11 says, Abraham died without receiving (in his lifetime) what God had promised him. Even so, he believed the message of life. John shows that this remains the manner of salvation, even after Jesus’ death and resurrection. Eternal life is a gift received the moment anyone believes that Jesus Christ has given him/her eternal life.

Does this make the cross-and-resurrection of Christ into a mere afterthought? Not at all. As glorious as eternal life is, believers look forward to living in the Lord’s presence in

resurrection bodies. The cross cleanses from sin and His resurrection as the firstfruits is what enables believers to be resurrected.

John 11:25–27 promises eternal life to every believer (now) and resurrection (in the future). Christ was free to give eternal life to all believers in John 11, in John 6, in John 5, and even in Genesis. However, He was not free to resurrect believers until after His own resurrection.<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusion**

John makes the message of life simple. Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ alone for eternal life receives it as a gift from Him. Evangelism is telling a lost and dying world this simple truth about the giver of life, Jesus Christ, God's Son. John has given sufficient reason to believe in Him. Each of the signs is sufficient to cause one to believe this message. In addition, the cross-and-resurrection is the means by which He equips those with eternal life to live with Him in their resurrection bodies.

For anyone who doubts that the message can be that simple, remember that Philip told Nathaniel to come and see. When Jesus made it clear that he already knew Nathaniel without having met him, Nathaniel believed.

*Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these."*

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<sup>30</sup> The raising of Lazarus did not give him a resurrection body. Although Jesus raised Lazarus, Jesus was the first to receive a resurrection body. In the course of time, Lazarus died. Resurrection bodies will not die.

Jesus was pleased that Nathaniel believed after seeing such a small sign. Believers ought to invite people to come and see this One who gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. What could be simpler?

—End—

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