

What Will Man Be Like for Countless Future Ages

by John Piper

This sermon delves into the final condition of redeemed humanity in the future ages, emphasizing the importance of knowing and loving God as the essence of eternal life. It explores the concept of being swallowed up by true life, where believers will experience ever-increasing knowledge, love, and joy in God for countless ages to come. The message highlights the significance of serving and reigning with God as our true calling, ensuring that our lives are continually set in motion by the hope of the eternal life that awaits us.

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Scripture: 1 John 3:2, 1 Corinthians 15:42, 2 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Timothy 6:19, John 17:3, Colossians 3:3, Matthew 13:43, Revelation 22:3, 1 John 5:11, Matthew 11:27

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Description

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Transcript

The title of this message is What Will Man Be Like for Countless Future Ages? What I have in mind is not primarily what our human nature is now, nor the process by which we will become what we will be, nor the events of death and the intermediate state between death and resurrection, nor the act of resurrection, but rather the final condition of redeemed humanity when history as we know it is over, completely past, resurrection is past, judgment is past, new heavens and new earth are come, the final condition of what we will be like for countless, yes, everlasting ages in the future. Now, why would a question like that be important to think about? The final condition in which we will spend billions and billions of ages of millennia. Why might that be important? To answer that question, I'm going to quote from J.I. Packer, who is largely quoting from Richard Baxter, who thought more about the saints' everlasting rest than probably anyone.

Here's the quote. The importance of clarity about what lies at the end of the Christian pilgrimage seemed to Richard Baxter incalculable. The more strongly one desires an end, the more carefully and diligently one will use the means to it.

The love of the end is the poise and spring which setteth every wheel a-going. I'm coming back to that. The love of the end is the poise and the spring that setteth every wheel to going or a-going.

But, he says, an unknown end will not be loved. It is a known and not merely an unknown God and happiness that the soul doth joyfully desire. Such desire then gives wings to the soul.

It is the heavenly Christian that is the lively Christian. It is strangeness to heaven that makes us so dull. It is the end that quickens to all the means.

And the more frequently and clearly this end is beheld, the more vigorous will be our motion. We run so slowly and strive so lazily because we so little mind the prize. That's the mind of the apostle.

Isn't it? Forgetting what lies behind, straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ. The love of the end is the spring that setteth every wheel a-going. It is the end that quickens all the means.

We run so slowly, we strive so lazily because we so little mind the prize. Now that is a thoroughly biblical way of thinking. Christians are to be energized in this vapor's breath called life by the end.

Consider a few texts. 1 John 3. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we shall be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.

That's the end. We shall be like him because we will see him as he is. Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself.

Every wheel of purification is set in motion by that vision of what we will be. 1 Corinthians 15. The dead body that is sown is perishable.

It is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.

Therefore, and that's the key word, therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding. Every wheel turning, abounding in the work of the Lord, because in the Lord you know your labor is not in vain. He will be raised imperishable.

That's the logic of the New Testament. Or 2 Corinthians 6. I will be their God. They will be my people and I will be a father to them and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit and bring holiness to completion in the fear of God. Every wheel of sanctification set in motion because of the promises. He'll be our God.

He'll be our Father. He will walk with us. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. We do not lose heart.

Why not? Why not? Some of you came ready to lose heart. We do not lose heart because this light momentary, like 80 or 90 or 100 years, is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. If you don't see it, if you don't love it, if you don't long for it, you're going to lose heart or you're going to become worldly and draw your strength in this world.

One more. How in the world shall we maintain joy and love our enemies without that hope? Matthew 5.11. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you. And utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven. For countless ages in the future, the reward of what we will be will be very great, great beyond reckoning. Over and over, the Bible makes it clear, it is the love of the end, what we will be like for countless future ages, that sets every wheel a-going in this life.

Now, if you were preaching this message, what would you focus on? The possibilities are endless. So I took my cue from a story that I remembered reading 29 years ago. It's in my file still, it's online still.

A story that Marshall Shelley told 29 years ago about losing one of his children. He's the editor, the former editor, 34 years he was the editor of Leadership Magazine. And he is now, I think, a professor or emeritus at Denver Seminary.

Here's the story. I'll just read three paragraphs of it. I was with my son his entire life, two minutes.

He entered the world of light and air at 8.20pm on November 22nd, 1991. And he departed, the doctor said, at 8.22. Do you have a name for the baby? Asked one of the nurses. Toby, Susan said.

It's short for a biblical name, Tobiah, which means God is good. John's vision of eternity, book of Revelation he's talking about, John's vision of eternity suggests that what is in store for all the saints is this. The throne of God, this is chapter 22, verse 3. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city.

And his servants will serve him. They will see his face. His name will be on their foreheads.

And they will reign with him forever. And then Marshall says, serving God and reigning, those tasks sound like they have more significance than the careers most of us pursue in our lifetimes. Could it be, he asks, that when I finally begin serving God with his name on my forehead, I will find that this is what I was truly created for? I may find I was created not for what I would accomplish on earth, but for the role I will fulfill in heaven.

Why did God create a child to live two minutes? He didn't. He created Toby for eternity. He created each of us for eternity.

Where we may be surprised to find our true calling, which always seemed just out of reach here on earth. End of story. Now that last phrase is, was, is very provocative to me.

Our true calling. Or before that, what I was truly created for. As if we have a calling here.

You have a calling here. And then, if he's right, you have a true calling there, then. What would that even mean? I was created for purposes in this life.

And then, will I find what I was truly created for in that life? Or is that even a biblical question? I think the Bible does encourage us to think of our eternal life beyond this present world as our true life. And our

calling there as our true calling. And the connection between Marshall Shelley's question and scripture is 1st Timothy 6, verse 19.

And that's, if you were to say, what's your text for this message? I would say 1st Timothy 6, verse 19. Where Paul instructs Timothy, like this. Store up treasure for yourselves.

No, they should store up treasure, those rich people, should store up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that you may take hold of that which is truly life. I want to know what that means. That's what this message is about.

So, my focus is not on glory. I love to talk about glory. It's on life.

I want to know what that means. The phrase, truly life, *ontos zoes*. *Zoes*, everybody knows what that is, zoology, right? Life, that's just life.

Ontos is the participial form of the... I mean, it's the adverb form of the participle, *own*, from *amy*, *own*. And you turn being, *own*, into an adverb, which would come over into English as *beingly*, *beingly* life, which we don't have a word, *beingly*, so that's not a good translation. So, it comes over as what? Really, real life, or true, true life.

Lay hold on that. Paul is trying to find words that express our final condition in terms of life. It's true life.

It's real life. It's full of being, *beingly* life, which means, according to that verse, that you don't have it yet. Lay hold on it.

Reach out for it. Store it up. Go for it.

You don't have it. Go for it. It's future.

Live for it. Die for it. Real life.

And so, I'm writing my message and I always have people looking over my shoulder. Like me, and you, and God. Yes, yes, yes.

One of the glories of Christianity is that this future life, this real life, has come into the world. By Christ. By the Spirit.

And it is wonder of wonders dwelling in hundreds of people in this room. 1 John 5. God gave us, gave us eternal life. And this life is in His Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. It's different from that other thing. It's different.

Whoever has the Son has that. True life. Real life.

He is the true God and is eternal life. The Son is eternal life. I am the way, the truth and the life.

I am the resurrection and the life. And the Son gives life to all He will. John 5.21. Everyone who believes has been born of God and He has passed from death to life.

He has died with Christ and been raised to walk in newness of life. The life of Jesus is manifest in His body. He has the Spirit and the mind of the Spirit is life.

So yes, yes, yes, by all means, yes. The heart of Christianity is the life that has come into the world. And we have tasted it.

It has become our life, our real life, our true life. But oh how imperfectly now we experience this life. Paul describes it as hidden.

It's hidden. Colossians 3. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. It's why we look so ordinary.

We don't look like gods. We don't look like sons of God. It's hidden.

You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, you will appear with Him in glory. So I say it again.

1 Timothy 6.19 says, you don't have it yet fully. So take hold of it, live for it, preach for it, pastor for it, lead for it, eat for it, drink for it. Set every wheel in motion by hope for it.

Jesus had the same way of thinking that Paul does. Of course, that's where Paul got it. There is a present life and there is a future life.

We should strive to enter that life. Here's what he says in Matthew 18.9. If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away... ..it is better for you to enter life with one eye... ..than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. We have a kind of life now... ..but there is a life into which we have not yet entered.

So live to enter it. The Apostle Paul raised this issue... ..in relationship to bodily life in 2 Corinthians 5. He spoke of our bodies, remember, as tents. Tents or a big overcoat that's so big it's like a tent.

That's what our bodies are. And he says that as much as he would like to be... ..away from the body and at home with the Lord... ..verse 8 of 2 Corinthians 5, as much as he would like that... ..because that's better than this life. Nevertheless, that's not his first choice.

He does not want to be stripped of his body. He doesn't want to die. He wants Jesus to come.

What will happen when Jesus comes to this body? And here's the way... Many of you know that phrase, but I love this phrase. Here's what he says. While we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened... ..not that we would be unclothed, bodiless in death... ..but that we would be further clothed... ..clothed over, so that what is mortal may be... ..swallowed up by life.

What a great phrase. You're alive when Jesus comes, you won't die. What will happen? You'll be swallowed.

You'll be swallowed by life. Why do we need to be swallowed by life if we're alive? I'm alive. I don't need to be swallowed by life.

I'm alive. No, you're not. You think you are.

You need to be swallowed by real life, ontos, zois. True life, life which is life indeed. We have tasted it.

In fact, it now defines us. We are far from experiencing it to the full, body and soul. Our final destiny, our final condition for those endless ages... ..is true life, real life.

And that life is in God and in his Son. Ephesians 4.18, he describes unbelievers like this. They are alienated from the life of God.

It's a terrible condition. It's the condition we were all in... ..until we were made alive in Christ Jesus. God the Father is absolute life.

Jesus said, as the Father has life in himself... ..so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And the Spirit gives life... ..carrying the life of the Father and the life of the Son into us. God, Father, Son and Spirit is absolute life.

He's not a stone. He's not gold. He's not silver.

He's not a primal gas that's always been there. He's not a cosmic computer, very advanced AI. He gives life.

He defines life. He is life. Thought, feeling, energy, action.

But more. Oh, so much more. And that more is our destiny for countless ages.

To be alive with such a life, God's life, real life... ..the more is where we're headed. Live for this. Preach for this.

Cause your people to fall in love with this. They don't, naturally. What will it be like? Let's take it in two steps.

What will that life... ..that true life, that endless life... ..that is in God and in the Son and by the Spirit in us... ..what will that be like when it is full? Let's talk about it first with regard to the body... ..and then with regard to the soul. For the body, Paul says it will mean... We've already seen it. It will mean being swallowed up by life.

The life of the age to come. The life that is true life. The life of full divine life.

As much life as a divine life can be in a created being... ..will be in us. He will swallow up our bodies. I think he means something like... My body is swallowed up by life.

My body will be transformed... ..and suited to that new life. So how much like our present bodies... ..will that new, swallowed up... ..perfectly suited for life body be? How much like this one? The New Testament wants us to think of... ..significant similarity... ..and massive dissimilarity. If there were no similarity, no continuity... I'm very conscious of this right now... ..because my wife is in Barnesville, Georgia.

Flew down two days ago. And she's staying up most of the night... ..trying to issue her 101-year-old mother into this. And I will probably do a funeral on the weekend.

I mean, be a part of it. I'm thinking of that. And I got on the phone today... ..with a man who has terminal cancer.

He was told in December. Many of you would know who it is. And we had a good 15-minute precious conversation... ..about my talk.

This is real... This is real relevant right now for me. You don't raise specific bodies from the dead... ..in order to throw them away. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead... ..means continuity, similarity.

Paul says, the dead in Christ will rise. Christ has been raised from the dead... ...the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. He will transform our lowly bodies... ...to be like his glorious body.

He will cause our body to be like his body. It will be our body. Not anybody else's.

And you don't need to worry about that. For reasons you'll hear in a minute. However, on the other hand, he says this.

What you sow is not the body that is to be. It's not. But a bare kernel.

Perhaps a wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body... ...as he has chosen. And to each kind of seed its own body.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. But we will be changed.

How? In what way? No death. No pain. No crying.

And every saint shining like the sun... ...in the kingdom of their father. So you don't need to worry. You're not shining right now.

Most people are really not pretty. Not handsome. And the older you get... ...the less pretty and the less handsome you're going to be.

If you think your glory now... ...is what you get, it's going to be better. That's Matthew 13.43. I remember 40 years ago that hit me. You will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your father.

You pimple-faced young teeth. That was 60 years ago. But I didn't see it then.

I remember seeing it later. The body is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body.

It is raised a spiritual body. What's that? That's a weird phrase. Spiritual body.

That's what happens... ...when the body is swallowed up... ...by real life. True life. Final life.

Divine life. It transforms the body. It fits the body for this new life.

The body is enlivened by God's Spirit. It's purified by God's Spirit. It's endowed by God's Spirit.

It's empowered by God's Spirit. It's brought into perfect harmony with God's Spirit... ...so that it will be called a spiritual body. Swallowed up by life.

Swallowed up by the life of God. The life of the Spirit. The spiritual body will have a kind of brain... ...that can really know as it is known.

It will have a kind of eyes... ...that can really see, truly see... ...what is really there. And all the senses will be tuned... ...perfectly by the Spirit... ...to detect in every created thing... ...every created person, the revelation of God. What about the soul? The non-bodily aspect of our being... ...when we are swallowed up by life.

What effect does it have on the mind... ..and on the heart to be swallowed up by life? Jesus said in John 17, verse 3... ..this is the most important verse I can think of... ..for getting at this question. This is eternal life... ..that they know you, the only true God... ..and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. The true life, real life... ..final life, divine life... ..is to know God and his Son.

Why would you call that life? I wouldn't have thought of that. Why would you call knowing God, knowing God... ..life? That's life! Here's my attempt at an answer. I feel it's inadequacy, but... ..I had to give this talk, and so... ..go public with your inadequate efforts.

Because, why would you call that life? Because God's life is knowing... ..to have life, to be life... ..is to know. And if we would share that life... ..we must know as he knows... ..know God as he knows God. In God's absolute existence... ..without beginning, without ending... ..absolutely there... ..before anything else existed... ..when there was only God... ..and let yourself think on this regularly... ..no galaxies, no earth... ..no space, in a sense, no nothingness... ..just God... ..always absolute being.

When he was there, and the word when doesn't make sense... ..because it's before time, but we've got to do the best we can... ..when he was there, he knew... ..he knew... ..he was a knowing being. To be God forever was to know... ..to know perfectly and infinitely... ..because he was perfect and infinite... ..as the object of his knowledge. That's all there was to know, was God.

And he knew God. And God is infinite, so his knowledge was infinite. And he not only knew... ..but he loved.

Now I make the connection here... ..you may think, that's coming out of the blue, why are you saying that? I'm making the connection between his knowing and his loving... ..because that's where Jesus is going at the end of this prayer. He starts the prayer with, eternal life is to know God... ..but he's going to end with relating knowing and loving... ..that's why I'm doing it right now. To know God is not only to share God's knowing... ..by knowing God... ..but it is also to share his loving.

Here's 1 John chapter 4. Love is from God. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love, does not know God.

Because God is love. And Paul says, if anyone loves God, he's known by God. So God knows and God loves.

God's life, his absolute eternal being... ..is a life of knowing and loving. And our eternal life, true life, real life, divine life... ..comes into that knowing and loving and shares in it by the Spirit. Before there was creation, and when there was only God... ..God knew and God loved.

He knew God and he loved God. Here's what Jesus said. This is Matthew 11, 27.

No one knows the Son except the Father. And no one knows the Father except the Son. It's who they are forever.

And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. He draws us by a gift into that knowing of the Father... ..of the Son and the Son of the Father. It's a gift.

Nobody has it but those to whom he chooses to give the knowing. Father loved the Son, the Son loved the Father... ..and the Spirit carried the knowing and the loving... ..between the Father and the Son, and

there was life. That was and is the life of God.

The ground of the universe, the life from which all else springs... ...is the knowing and loving God. Therefore, when we taste that life... ...and finally are swallowed up by that life, we know God. We know him experientially, we know him as he knows.

This is eternal life, that they know you... ...the only true God and Jesus whom you have sent. And when Jesus began his prayer... ...the John 17 high priestly prayer... ...when he began that prayer, he knew how he would end the prayer. When he said, this is eternal life, that they know you... ...he didn't mean know like the devil knows God or know like the devil knows Jesus.

The devil knows God and Jesus pretty well... ...because that kind of knowing is death. It's death, it's not life. No, the kind of knowing he had in mind was an affectionate intimacy... ...knowing, knowing in such a way that it awakens love... ...knowing the way God knows, because God lovingly knows the Son... ...knowing so that knowing and loving are inseparable in your life and his life.

Now, where do we see Jesus make that plane? And the answer is in the last verse of the prayer. Jesus closes the prayer, verse 26... ...by praying into existence divine knowing in you... ...and divine loving in you. That's what he's praying, and he gets his prayers answered for his people.

He does. None of Jesus' prayers for his elect fails. Here's the verse.

I, Jesus, made known to them... Now, them is the disciples, but up in verse 20 he said, I'm not praying only for them... ...but for those who would believe on me through their word. That's you. Let this land very personally.

I made known to them your name... ...and I will continue to make it known... This is eternal life, to know God. I will continue to make it known that the love... ...with which you have loved me, Father has loved the Son... ...may be in them and I in them. That's one of the most glorious verses in the Bible.

Let me paraphrase it with John Piper's unauthorized, very fallible paraphrase. I give them life, real life, true life... ...our divine life, Father. That is, I cause them to know you... ...for the treasure and the beauty that you really are... ...and their knowledge of you is so affirming and so approving... ...and so satisfying that your love for me... ...has become their love for me.

They know you as I know you. They love me as you love me. Indeed, they love me with your very love for me... ...which has come into their lives by the Spirit.

This is life, this is true life, real life, final life, on toast, zoes. This is the life we will possess in fullness... ...for countless ages, to know God and to love God... ...to love his Son, to know his Son by his Spirit... ...which means that we will enjoy God forever... ...because to love him is to enjoy him... ...with the very knowledge and love of God himself. Now, to close, let me just raise this specter that I had when I was 12 years old.

It's going to be boring. It's going to get boring. I mean, a thousand years? A thousand ages of years? Billions upon billions upon billions upon billions of years? I mean, kids have a better sense of eternity than most of us... ...at least if they lie down on the roof of their house at night and look into the sky.

So, lest you think, or we think... ..that true life, eternal life, God's life in us... ..will become boring after some millions of years... ..remember two things. First, remember that this life is a loving rooted in a knowing... ..and the knowing will increase forever... ..so that the loving increases forever... ..and the delight increases forever. Here's the way Jonathan Edwards defends that statement.

Their knowledge will increase to all eternity. With what? Increase with what? He answers, a whole million, million ages... ..of those great and most glorious things that come to pass in heaven. You get that? Things happen in the age to come.

They happen. They're new. And so your knowledge is new.

You're not stuck with, I know as I'm known, static, billions of years... ..as if nothing's happening. There's nothing new to see, nothing new to feel, nothing new to know. Okay, I'm not supposed to expound on Edwards.

Let Edwards say Edwards. And here's the continuation of the quote. And if their knowledge increases, doubtless their holiness... ..for as they increase in knowledge of God and of the works of God... ..the more they will see of his excellency, and the more they see of his excellency... ..the more will they love him, and the more they love him... ..the more they will delight and find happiness in him.

End of Edwards. There'll be no boredom in heaven in the age to come... ..for countless ages of eternity... ..because his mercies are new every morning. And our knowledge of them will be new, and our love of them will be new... ..and our joy in them will increase forever.

That's not a mathematical impossibility when you're talking about infinite. Finally, the second thing you should remember... ..when you are tempted, think, or you're dealing with your child's question... ..that it might be boring after a few billion millennia... ..was prompted by Marshall Shelley in this question. He said, could it be that when I finally begin serving... ..with God's name on my forehead... ..I will find that this is what I was truly created for? That this is finally the true life.

And he's quoting Revelation 22, verse 3. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city... ..and his servants will have his name on their forehead... ..and will serve him. They will see his face... ..and they will reign forever and ever. To which Shelley responds, serving and reigning... ..those tasks sound like they might have more significance... ..than the careers most of us pursue in our lifetimes.

Well, that's an understatement. Therefore, the true life that we will have for countless future ages... ..will not be boring. Not only because it will be a life of ever-increasing knowledge of God... ..and ever-increasing love of God and ever-increasing enjoyment of God... ..as he reveals more and more of himself and his ways... ..but also because that knowing and loving and enjoying... ..will be the spring that sets every wheel a-going.

We will not be idle. We will find our true calling. We will serve.

We will reign. We will be up and doing and making and creating... ..and singing. Baxter's wisdom is true.

Not only for the present life, but forever. The love of the end, including when we get there... ..the love of the end is the spring that sets every wheel a-going. If that's true now, which it is... ..for how little we taste of that life... ..how much more will it set the wheels a-going when the fullness comes? So, brothers, for the sake of your own soul... ..and for the good of your people, take hold on life... ..which is life indeed.

Let's pray. Father, this world is so desperately in need... ..of people whose wheels are set a-going... ..by the hope of life. People who know this is not it.

This is not it. This is shadow, and that's the body, that's real. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God... ..and when Christ, our life, appears, we will appear... ..and we will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father... ..and we will realize, why did a child live two minutes? They didn't.

Why did I live 47 years? You didn't. Why did Pamela Henry live 101 years? She didn't. So, God, cause us to walk in this glorious hope.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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