

Breath Of Life
Series: Advent 2009 [#1]
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Introduction

The Tortoise And The Hare is one of the familiar Aesop's Fables. The hare bragged about how fast he could run to all the forest animals, laughing as he compared himself to the Tortoise. The tortoise promptly challenged the hare to a race, which made the hare laugh even more. The forest animals set out the course and the race began. The hare quickly left the tortoise in the dust. When he reached the half way point he decided to stop and play in a meadow since he was so far ahead. Then he took a nap. When he woke up, he sprinted to the finish line... only to see the tortoise across the line, patiently waiting for him. The moral of the story is slow and steady wins the race.

We can draw a lesson from this old story for the Advent season. There is so much planning to get done, many to-do lists, shopping, decorating, baking, and special events to attend. We sprint into the season with determination and the best intentions, but can easily come to the finish line of Christmas and find we haven't been successful in honoring and worshiping Christ as we should. We are going to look at some themes in these four weeks of Advent that can help us focus our thoughts and priorities and, most importantly, focus on Christ Himself. We will return to the series in the book of Romans after Christmas.

Today's theme is *Breath Of Life*. People think of different things when they hear this phrase:

- God's creation of Adam.
- The sanctity of human life.
- CPR.
- Exercising.
- Courses to help stop smoking.

The percentage of people whose first thoughts are about Jesus isn't that high. Yet Jesus, God the Son who became one of us, who drew His first breath as the God-Man in our world in that manger in Bethlehem, is the *Breath Of Life*. Let's think about what that means, and what it means to us. We start with the truth that...

Jesus Is The Breath Of Life.

The Bible states this as a fact. The apostle John makes it clear in the first chapter of his gospel. In verse four he writes, "In Him [that is, Christ, the Word] was *life*, and *the life* was the Light of men." Life was, and is in Christ. There are three words in the language of the New Testament that can be translated life. Their meanings overlap a great deal, so often we can't push the distinctions that much. In John's writing, the word used here usually

expresses real life, life of and from God, eternal life.¹ John underscores this as he moves forward in the gospel. In 5:26 he tells us that Jesus said, “For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave the Son also to have life in Himself.” Then there is Jesus’ familiar statement in chapter 14, “I am the way, and the truth, and *the life*...” (14:6). Jesus is the *Breath of life*.

Let’s explore that. Back up a step. The Bible tells us God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the self-existent, eternal God. Abraham and Moses referred to Him as “the everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33; Psalm 90:2). One of the most beautiful word pictures of this truth is in Moses’ final blessing on Israel as he said, “The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Paul wrote that God “alone possesses immortality” (1 Timothy 6:16). Jesus asserted His deity and being eternal when he told the scribes and Pharisees “before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). In the first chapter of The Revelation Jesus declares,

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’ (alpha and omega being the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so He is the first and last), says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’” (Revelation 1:8)

In the last chapter He states the truth again, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:12).

Because we are creatures of time, we cannot really conceive let alone plumb the depths of this truth. We should say simply, “God exists.” But from our perspective we need to go on and say that God always has and always will exist. Taking that a step farther, if God were not self-existent and eternal, it would mean He had a beginning, that something or someone gave *Him* life. He would not have life in Himself. He would not be the *Breath of life*. But He is, and Jesus is the *Breath of life*. As the *Breath of Life*,

Jesus Gives The Breath Of Life.

He did this as He spoke creation into being. The opening line of the Bible tells us “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). As we continue on in that record of God’s work of creation, we read at each point “God said” (e.g., 1:3, 6, 9 etc.). God spoke creation into being.

Most of us probably picture God the Father speaking and doing the work. While that is true, it is not the full picture. And not having the full or an accurate picture can lead to misconceptions. Most of you know that Anita works with children. They usually love to see her. But one day a four year-old told his Mom he didn’t want to go to her office. When his Mom explored this, she discovered that her son thought she told him he was going to get *a needle*, not going to see Anita. Once that misconception was cleared up he was happy to go! *Misconceptions*.

The Bible reveals that God the Son and Holy Spirit were involved in creation with God the Father. Genesis 1:2, for example, says “the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.” Christ’s role is described in the opening verses of John’s gospel.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (1:1-3)

And again, “the world was made through Him” (1:10). In Colossians chapter 1 Paul tells us,

“by Him [Christ] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” (1:16-17)

Jesus gave the breath of life to all living beings. God told Noah that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence (Genesis 6:11-12), so He was bringing a flood “to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life” (6:17). All people and all the land animals would be destroyed. And, so Noah’s task was to build an ark for his family and pairs of all those animals to survive the flood. Jesus gave the breath of life to all living creatures during creation.

More specifically, He shaped and breathed life into Adam. We turn back to the Genesis record of creation. 1:26-27,

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Some additional detail is added in chapter 2 verse 7,

“Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

We are not told any more specifics on how God did this. Perhaps Christ, God the Son, appeared on the spot in His pre-incarnation form of the Angel of the LORD and shaped Adam’s body. But we also find the same word *formed* or shaped later in verse 19 that tells us “Out of the ground the LORD god *formed* every beast of the field and every bird of the sky.” Now, the first chapter tells us God *spoke* the beasts and birds into being. So God has not revealed exactly how He formed Adam’s body.

What God does say very clearly is that He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:7). This is significant because in doing this God made Adam, and then Eve (cf. 2:21-22), as unique beings in His creation. As 1:26-27 tells us, they and so we, are made in the image and likeness of God. In Acts 17 the apostle Paul told the great thinkers of Athens,

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.” (24-29)

We are not just living beings, we are living beings who are like and represent God. Once we are given life we live forever either in fellowship with God or separated from Him by our sin. We not only have a unique reasoning ability, but we also are spiritual beings—created to know, worship and serve God. That is realized when we are recreated by His grace through placing our faith in Christ, and then to grow or develop in all of these things.

This truth shows us the great value we have before God. Our life, our existence is precious to God. Every person on this earth bears His image, even though that image is marred by sin. So, we are to respect every person as being created in God’s image. Every person’s life is valuable to God, and so we are to value the life of every person. Every person is loved by God who desires him or her to come to Him. So we are to love them with Christ’s love, no matter how *unlovable* they may appear to us, and do all that we can to let them know about God and how they can be recreated in Christ.

And that leads us to the next aspect of Christ giving the breath of life. He gives life eternal. Earlier we thought a bit about God being eternal, that He is self-existent, that He always has existed and always will. Because we are creatures, dominated by beginnings and endings, we struggle trying to get a picture of eternity. So we often think of it as a very, very, very long time.

Hendrik VanLoon wrote a book title *The Story of Mankind*, in which he tells us,

“High up in the North, in the land called Svithjod, there stands a rock. It is 100 miles high and 100 miles wide. Once every 1000 years a little bird comes to this rock to sharpen its beak.

When the rock has thus been worn away, then a single day of eternity will have gone by.”²

He was trying to paint a picture of the vastness of eternity as a very, very, very, very long time. But, of course, eternity is not measured by time as we know it. Thinking of a very, very, very long time may in some small way help picture eternity and eternal life, but it really doesn't come close to describing them.

Let's look at some things about eternal life that Jesus gives that we know from the Bible. The first is, as we have already noted, that once given life everyone will live forever. As great as the differences in geography, culture, standard of living, health and longevity are, they do not compare with the difference in the quality of life and eternal destiny between those who are the children of God through Christ and those who are not. Rather than focus on some of those differences this morning, I want you to think about a few of the many present tense, here and now qualities of having received eternal life as God's gift through faith in Jesus.

First, we now have constant access to God who directs, confirms, gives wisdom and provides for us in response to and beyond our prayers. Then we have the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us. We also have been given spiritual abilities for serving God to fulfill our calling of glorifying Him through good, godly works. As well, even when it doesn't seem possible, God gives us the power to do all the things he asks us to do, to face all the challenges and opportunities in front of us. With the apostle Paul we can say "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). I don't have to take a survey here. All of us have struggled with realizing this truth at times. While our experience may change, God's truth does not.

And, going with that, as Paul writes in Romans 6, we are no longer under the master, under the bondage of sin (6:14). Yes, we have been granted, as the apostle Peter wrote,

“everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:3-4)

And then, looking at the present and toward the future, all through life God is preparing us for that great day and transformation when we will see Him face to face, when Christ will "present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27). And these are just a few of the many things we now have because Jesus has given us the gift of eternal life.

Conclusion.

Jesus is the *Breath of Life*. So what difference does that make to you on this first day of Advent, during this Christmas season? All of us should thank God that He "so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

There is a story that, while not a true-life story, illustrates part of God’s great love for us. In a Sunday evening service at one church, the pastor introduced a friend he had known from childhood and asked the elderly man to come up and say a few words. The man began, “A father, his son and a friend of his son were sailing when a fast-approaching storm blocked their attempts to get back to shore. Even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright. The boat capsized and the three were swept into the ocean.”

The old man paused for a moment, making eye contact with two teenagers who, for the first time since the service began, looked somewhat interested. He continued, “Grabbing the one and only rescue line, the father had to make the most difficult decision of his life—to which boy would he throw the line? He had only seconds to make the decision. He knew his son was a Christian and that his son’s friend was not. As he yelled “I love you son!” he tossed the line to his son’s friend. By the time he pulled him back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the waves. His body was never recovered.

Now the two teenagers were on the edge of their seats. “The father,” the man continued, “knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and he could not bear the thought of his son’s friend stepping into eternity without Jesus. So he sacrificed his only son to save his son’s friend. How great,” he concluded, “is the love of God that He should do the same for us.”

Right after the service the two teenagers went straight to the old man. “That was a nice story,” one of them said politely, “but I don’t think it was very realistic for a father to give up his only son’s life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian.” “You’ve got a point there,” the old man replied. He looked down for a moment and then back at them with a smile on his face, “It sure isn’t very realistic, is it? But I’m standing here today to tell you that story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give up His son for me. You see ... I was the father in that story ... and your pastor is my son’s friend.”³

“How deep the Father’s love for us. How vast beyond all measure. That He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure ... How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns His face away as wounds which mar the chosen One, bring many sons to glory ... Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer. But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.”³

If you have not yet received the greatest gift ever given, eternal life from Jesus, the *Breath of Life*, receive it, receive Him today. Talk with me, or someone else here about this.

If you have received eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord, ask God to breathe on you, breathe into you a renewal of closeness and obedience to Him. Thank Him that He has given you the breath of life and also the breath of eternal life with Him. Determine to breathe Christ in and out of all your thoughts, words, plans and activities this season. Determine to

live and tell others about Jesus, the *Breath of life*, so they too can know Him forever and truly honor Him this Christmas.

¹ The three words: bios (βίος), zōē (ζωή), psuchē (ψύχη). ζωή is used here. See the shade of meaning with ψύχη in John 12:25 (ψύχη in 25a, 25b and ζωή in 25c (ζωὴν αἰώνιον, “eternal life”).

² Van Loon, Hendrik Willem. *The Story Of Mankind*. (New York: Boni & Liveright Inc.), 1921, p. 1.

³ A number of versions of this story can be found on the internet. There is no indication that this story tells the account of an actual event. The original writer is not known. It is a story written to make a point, which it does well and when being used should be indicated as a story, not an actual event. Among many others, it can be found at:

<<http://www.sermonillustrationlibrary.org/illustration45>>

<<http://www.snopes.com/glurge/choice.asp>>

<<http://www.scribd.com/doc/17281534/A-Collection-of-Inspirational-Short-Stories>>

Each of the above sites accessed 27 November 2009.

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