

## THINGS THAT LAST–FOREVER

The story of the Bible is a story about God creating, of sin and death entering, and of God seeking after us humans. It is a drama about God sending messengers and prophets in order to communicate to us his law, his love, his anger, and his wrath. It is a recital of those special ones who turn back to God and of God forming a people, a nation, through love and patience, through discipline and correction. The goal of the Bible is to show how God does this by his gift of a Savior, his Messiah or Anointed One, to the world in order to bless the entire world. In the book of Genesis, God tells the patriarch Abraham, one of those special ones, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12.2-3).<sup>1</sup> This promise by God—all nations will be blessed through Abraham and his descendants—is repeated over and over in the Old Testament and finds its fulfillment in the New Testament. Here, the apostle Paul states that “the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed” (Galatians 3.8-9). Reflect on the impact of the life of Abraham for just a moment. No, Abraham was not a perfect man. But Abraham was a man full of faith in his God. These are quite good and remarkable results for one person’s life. Abraham clung to, tenaciously, something that lasts. And it is this heritage of faith that lasts forever.

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<sup>1</sup>Biblical quotes are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989) unless indicated otherwise.

Today, our world needs and our world longs for things that last—forever. We live in a time of constant change. There are new technologies, shifting medical outlooks, companies merging and realigning, and the diminishing effectiveness of government. There is family fragmentation, the loss of faith in traditional forms of authority, and the loss of stability in society from erosion of the influence of church, schools, homes, and civic groups. To see how fickle things are in our world, just check out the current projected Megatrends. It seems like nothing lasts, or does it. There are some things that seem to last, some things we wish would go away. How about those hairs in unwanted places after you turn forty years old, or, baldness, graying, “floaters” in your eyes, onions on your breath, and onions on someone else’s breath. Then, there are ice-crunchers. The Energizer Bunny lasts forever (so they say), and the home run record of Roger Maris was supposed to last forever (so we thought). Some things that seem to last forever are poverty, crime, abuse, and, of course, the proverbial death and taxes. The Bible tells us about some things that last—forever. These are reliable and dependable, and they are a sure foundation for our hope and our confidence.

*The Word of God.* The apostle Peter tells us, “You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ That word is the good news that was announced to you” (1 Peter 1.23-25; cf. Isaiah 40.6-8). Peter here quotes from the prophet Isaiah who spoke the word of the Lord to God’s people when the world’s great powers—Assyria and Babylon—were threatening other nations, including Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem). Assyria conquered Samaria, and Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. But where is Assyria now? Where is Babylon?

Take note. All flesh . . . all its glory . . . will fall. But as Peter and Isaiah both tell us, the word of our God . . . imperishable seed . . . will stand forever. We can be sure that the word of God will last—forever.

*Bread and Water.* Bread and water are basics for life; they are the very essence of sustenance for life as we know it. In the gospel according to John, we, like the disciples, are introduced to forever bread and forever water. In John, chapter 4, Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar (i.e., Jacob’s well). Here he speaks to her about living water, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (verse 10). The contrast is between this living water and the well’s water. If you drink the water from the well, you will become thirsty again. But if you drink living water, Jesus says, you “will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become . . . a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (verse 14). The woman has faith, because she says, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water” (verse 15). She desires . . . she wants . . . she thirsts. And Jesus refreshes her (verses 16ff.). How does Jesus quench her thirst (i.e., the thirsting of her soul)?

First, by self-examination and reflection on her past, Jesus leads her to acknowledge his role in obtaining this living water that lasts forever. After Jesus discusses her marital situation with her, she confesses, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet” (verse 19). Second, by insight about prayer and devotion to God, Jesus leads her toward the heavenly Father. In verses 21-24, he says, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Then, Jesus leads her to himself as Messiah (verses 25-26). She says, “I know that Messiah is coming. . . . When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus replies, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” As a result of this encounter and revelation, the woman “left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’” (verses 28-29). Finally, Jesus led the woman to himself as the Messiah, and in turn the woman leads others to Jesus. When the woman brought news about Jesus to the people of her town, they went out to see this Jesus for themselves (verse 30). And John tells us that “many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (see verses 39-42). One thirsty soul leads other thirsty souls to the one who can quench their thirst—forever. This is living water, water that lasts—forever.

In John, chapter 6, we learn about bread that lasts forever. John tells us about the feeding of five thousand followers by Jesus (verses 1-15) and how Jesus walked on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (verses 16-21). He then narrates an extended discussion between Jesus and some of the people who came to Capernaum from Tiberias (verses 25ff.). Jesus tests them—their sincerity and their motives. He challenges them, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal” (verses 26-27). And, they are seeking, for they reply, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” (verse 28). Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (verse 29). Compare 1 John 3.23,

“This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us.”

But the followers from Tiberias were skeptical. They asked Jesus, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (verses 30-31). This response seems rather incredulous of them, since earlier they had experienced the feeding of so many by the hand of Jesus. But Jesus is patient with them and replies, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (verses 32-33). Jesus points them to “true bread” which is “food that endures for eternal life” or bread that lasts forever. This gets their attention; this is what they want—never to be hungry again. “Sir, give us this bread always,” they say to Jesus (verse 34). So Jesus tells them plainly:

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day” (verses 35-40).

Jesus clearly identifies himself as this “bread of life” that lasts forever. “I am,” he says. And he emphatically states that “this is . . . the will of my Father.” But the reluctance of these followers to believe him (see verses 41-42) causes Jesus, I think, to speak more deeply, even mysteriously, about his flesh and his blood and about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Jesus explains:

“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. . . . Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever” (verses 48-58).

This is the bread—the flesh of Jesus, the blood of Jesus—that lasts forever. This puzzled many of the followers of Jesus. They said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” (verse 60).

And John tell us that “because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him” (verse 66). Even the twelve, who were closest to Jesus, were rattled by all of this (verses 67ff.). Maybe we too feel uncomfortable with the direct and forceful teaching of Jesus. And, as to his followers then, he asks us now, “Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (verses 61-63). Jesus clarifies for us, and in this clarity comes the crux of the matter.

In the Judaism of the time of Jesus, they thought that adherence to the benefits of the ancestors sustained them. The ancestors ate bread from God (i.e., manna) in the wilderness, and they survived. In our society of Western capitalism, we think that money is what sustains us and gives us life. In modern lingo, we refer to money as “bread” or “dough.” Money is our dough, our bread. But, according to what Jesus has said, if we think that, we think wrongly. So, as his followers today, we must ask: What is our bread? What is our drink? What motivates us? What drives us? What shapes or fashions our goals, our dreams, and our passions? When we answer

these questions, we will find our drink and our bread. Jesus says to us, unless it is him, it will not last forever.

*Jesus.* This brings us to Jesus as the One who will last forever and ever. This is because the life of Jesus will last forever. He is the First and the Last (i.e., the Beginning and the End), the Living One, the Alpha and the Omega, who says in Revelation 1.18, “I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.” Of his kingdom, or his rule, there is no end (see Isaiah 9.7; Luke 1.33; John 12.34; 1 Corinthians 15.25). His throne will last forever (Hebrews 1.8). In this Jesus of Nazareth, the Living One whom his first disciples called Lord, Master, and Messiah (i.e., the Christ), there is a true constant. As Hebrews 13.8 puts it, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” So, the writer exhorts us, “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings” (Hebrews 13.9).

*The One Who Does the Will of God.* Finally, those who place their trust and their confidence in Jesus, the Living One who will last forever, will experience this unending existence. They too will last forever. In his brief letter to Christians, John tells us, “And the world and its desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever” (1 John 2.17). This world—the cravings of the old nature, the desires of our eyes, the boastings about what we have and what we do—all this, John says, is “not from the Father but from the world” (verse 16). But if we let Jesus work in our hearts, through faith in him we will overcome the fleeting trends and the passing fads of this life. We too will last forever.