

Zoe

^{NIV} **John 17:1** After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

^{NIV} **Romans 12:1** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Zoe

When we talk about life, we're often talking about physical life. We talk about life expectancy in one country versus another. We speak of the number of lives lost in earthquakes, floods, or war. We refer to lives shortened by various life styles and health conditions. Much of the time we think of life in terms of eating, breathing, reproducing, getting around from place to place, some of the basic aspects of the definition of life that we may have learned in high school biology.

We go to the zoo to see the animals. We might remember from our high school science days that zoology is the study of animals. Some people have the outline of a fish on the back of their car. That's an ichthus and ichthyology is the study of fish. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to realize that theology is the study of theos, the Greek word for God. And biology is the study of bios, a Greek word for life.

Today, because of various medical technologies, many people in the church and in society in general are highly focused on the *bios* life. When does *bios* begin and end? Is it determined by heartbeat, by ability to breathe, by ability to eat, by the presence of brain waves, or by some other biological criteria? Bios, physical, biological life can become our whole lens for understanding and thinking about life. We've all heard of cases where someone has been in a vegetative state for months or years, supported by machinery that kept various bios processes going, and there being great argument and concern for the life, the bios, of the patient.

This same emphasis on bios can be seen in other areas, as well. I heard a lawyer arguing in court this past week that the primary purpose of marriage (perhaps the only purpose) was to produce children. That lawyer saw marriage as bios, not relationship. He had obviously never seen my eighty-year-old parents share a tender warm kiss or he would have known that marriage was about relationship as well as bios.

This same focus on bios can permeate our religious faith, as well. For some people, religion is all about not dying or not suffering. Everyone knows how terribly painful burns can be. Those who have been exposed to the smell of burning sulphur know that the stench is terrible. So, with hell described in terms of pain and stench, a place that would make bios uncomfortable and miserable, they seek some way to avoid that physical torment. Heaven is pictured as a place of great beauty, physical comfort, maintained at a constant 72 degrees, a place not of work and toil but of rest, in short, a place where bios is pleasant. And if this is the full scope of one's understanding of life and faith then salvation is all about physical comfort, about the physical life, the bios. Confess that you believe in Jesus. Be baptized. Come to church and put some money in the plate. This reduces Jesus to someone offering fire insurance. Your policy is issued when you get baptized and all those sins that would send you to hell get washed away. Then, come to church and pay your insurance premiums when the plate is passed.

But in our heart of hearts, deep inside, we know - or hope - that there is more to life than just bios. Many years ago, Peggy Lee sang a song that asked, "Is This All There Is?" and it was especially depressing because the song found nothing beyond bios. The book "Hitchhiker of the Galaxy" was a cult hit a few decades ago. It asked, what is the meaning of life - and gave the answer - 42. That was a way of saying either there is no meaning to life, or we have no idea what the meaning of life might be so we'll just give a flip answer and give up on the question.

Last night some of us watched the movie, *Invictus*. Nelson Mandela was in prison for twenty-seven years. For twenty-seven years he made little rocks out of big rocks day after day. For twenty-seven years he

slept on the floor in a cell that was about six by eight feet. When he was released he could have continued life by the paradigms that he had experienced. He could have extracted retribution. People could have been held accountable and made to pay for the suffering that he had experienced. Instead, he searched for radical ways to unite and heal South Africa. Thousands of lives were saved by quenching the fires of revenge. Millions of lives became better through peace and prosperity.

What do you remember about any of the Presidents of India? Or, do you remember Gandhi and Mother Teresa? Who had the more meaningful life - the commandant of Auschwitz or Oskar Schindler? Who do you remember from the late sixties, the governors of various southern states - or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? You probably have no idea who the prominent political powers were in Italy in the late 1100s and early 1200s, but you have probably heard of St. Francis of Assisi. These are people whose lives were more than just bios.

Almost eighteen years ago our first grandchild was born. She was named Zoe. About two weeks ago we attended her high school graduation. This sermon isn't about my granddaughter, although if you drop by my study, I'll be happy to brag on her for longer than you might find comfortable. Cathy had been reading a book by Richard J. Foster titled *Life with God*. Based on what she had read, Cathy wrote a long note to our granddaughter, telling her what a special name she has. People don't usually pick out names for their children based on the meaning of the name - and I'm sure that Sharon chose Zoe as her daughter's name because she liked the sound of it.

As it turns out, Zoe is another Greek word that means life. Whereas *bios* means physical life, the biological life, *zoe* refers to something much broader and deeper. Zoe is about transcendent life, life beyond physical existence. Zoe is about having meaning and purpose in life, about fullness of life, a life well lived, a life of substance in the best sense of the word. The New Testament writers very seldom speak of *bios*, but they talk a lot about *zoe*.

Zoe is the sort of life that Jesus taught and lived. He said, "I have come so that you might have zoe and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) Jesus says that he came so that we might have abundant life - not abundant life - not abundant toys, abundant homes, or abundant bank accounts. He came to show us how to live a life with abundant zoe, abundant meaning, abundant purpose and fulfillment.

One way of expressing the concept of living a Christ-like life is to say that one is living in Christ. In a letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul says that when you live in Christ, you become a new creation, a new person. When you follow Christ, when you begin to emulate his way of living, you change from only knowing life as bios, to beginning to lead a life of Zoe, a life that transcends, goes beyond, the mere physical existence of eating, sleeping, working, and being entertained. Paul says that we are given the ministry, the work, of reconciliation. Doing that work puts zoe in our life.

Paul told the Romans that they must move from being in conformity with this world, that they were to be transformed, changed by the renewing, the readjustment, of their minds. This includes moving from bios thinking to zoe thinking. It means changing from being focused on ourselves to being aware of and concerned for the needs of others. It's illustrated when we love others just like we love ourselves.

The writer of First Timothy urges the reader to "take hold of the zoe that is really zoe." Go for the gusto, so to speak. Grab the good stuff, the zoe. How does one do that? The writer says to "do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share." That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't just preach good - he did good. He lived what he taught and taught what he lived - a life of meaning, a life that transcended physical concerns, a life of zoe.

One way to tell if someone has only lived a life of bios or if they have also lived a life of zoe is to go to their funeral. When I moved to St. Louis I had a boss named John Struckoff. I didn't know him very well and he was killed in an accident at home about six months later. I went to the funeral because it seemed like the proper, culturally correct thing to do. John wasn't famous or powerful or rich and he died in a stupid accident. But the very large church was packed and people were standing around the edges of the sanctuary. Some had driven some distance to be there. There was far more than family and a few business associates in attendance. John had not only lived bios, but he had also lived zoe. For months and years afterward I found myself wondering, if I died this week, who would show up for my funeral?

Which brings us to the subject of life after death. If all we are concerned about is the hereafter, we cheat ourselves of the great gift of zoe that Jesus lived and taught. Jesus didn't spend much time selling fire

insurance. But he did come to show us how to live a life of zoe, a life that goes beyond the mundane considerations of existence. Bios living is temporary. If you eat today, you will be hungry again tomorrow. If you sleep tonight, you will still need sleep tomorrow night. Whatever bios issue you deal with, you will need to deal with it over and over again. Bios life is temporary.

Zoe life is different. The kindness you do for someone else today may bear fruit far in the future. The clean shirt you pass on to Cooperative Community Ministries may be just what someone else needs for a successful job interview. The food you put in the red wagon in the hall may feed a child so that she can concentrate on her studies in school. Zoe life has consequences far into the future. Zoe life has eternal values and eternal worth. We misspeak when we talk about eternal life as only being in the future. Eternity has no beginning and no end. We are born into eternity and for each of us eternity is from now on. Zoe is the eternal life and each of us can begin living that life now. God doesn't withhold that from us until some future moment. Rather, God came and lived among us to teach and show us how to have eternal life from now on. Put a bit of zoe into your life! Amen

^{NRS} John 10:9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

^{NRS} **1 Timothy 6:18** They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,¹⁹ thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

^{NRS} **2 Corinthians 5:17** So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;