

And this is eternal life

There's an old Australian Stockman, lying, dying. And he gets himself up on one elbow and he says

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Painting by Julie Skelton

Yes! We know what he says to his mates. It's about tying up kangaroos but letting wallabies go free and some other racist and gruesome wishes as well. These things have gone out of fashion. Indeed because of his private life, Rolf Harris has gone out of fashion.

But there's nothing like imminent death of someone famous or not so famous like an old stockman to get us listening.

Last night we watched a film called *Gifted*, which I do recommend, not just for the acting of the little girl. But the whole plot of the film hung on the last wishes of the little girl's mother.

The passage today, John 17 and versus 1 to 11 are Jesus' last wishes. That should make us sit up and listen. These should be important.

It's a prayer of Jesus but one that others listened to and remembered. They form part of Jesus' parting speech to his disciples that happens to be 4 chapters long. This passage, the first few verses of John 17 crystallises his message. I urge you to read it again with new eyes and mind, ones that are waiting for the most important message a person might ever give. You can read it here again if you like in the written version of this talk.

John 17:1-11 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

After Jesus had finished speaking to his disciples, he looked up toward heaven and prayed: Father, the time has come for you to bring glory to your Son, in order that he may bring glory to you. And you gave Him power over all people, so that He would give eternal life to everyone you give him. Eternal life is to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent. I have brought glory to you here on earth by doing everything you gave me to do. Now, Father, give me back the glory that I had with you before the world was created.

You have given me some followers from this world, and I have shown them what you are like. They were yours, but you gave them to me, and they have obeyed you. They know that you gave me everything I have. I told my followers what you told me, and they accepted it. They know that I came from you, and they believe that you are the one who sent me. I am praying for them, but not for those who belong to this world. My followers belong to you, and I am praying for them. All that I have is yours, and all that you have is mine, and they will bring glory to me.

Holy Father, I am no longer in the world. I am coming to you, but my followers are still in the world. So keep them safe by the power of the name that you have given me. Then they will be one with each other, just as you and I are one.

Jesus is talking about his big aims. Why was he born, related to people on earth, taught, gathered a group around him to instruct and show, suffered, died? We can see the answers in this short passage.

The goal of the commission could be described as;-

- the passing on of eternal life (v2),
- thus enabling people to know God and Jesus Christ (3),
- to keep the word (6),
- to receive the words (8),
- to know and believe what the Son claims about his commission (8),
- to glorify the Son (10)
- and to become one (11).

All that! - in the space of 11 verses. There's a segment on ABC Radio National called *Life in 500 Words*. The idea is to distill what you have learned about life into a short talk. Jesus does it in 278 words. (My computer told me so.)

I won't try to cover all of these but they are points to ponder. I won't use much of your time or your megabytes.

Eternal life is to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent. I know eternal life is not the same as heaven but it reminded me of a scene I saw on TV late one night this week. (No! I don't spend all my time in front of a screen.)

In the SBS series of *The New Pope*, of which I have only seen one. The Pope (who is no longer a pope as he has been replaced even while he is alive) leans over a boy who was disabled from birth and whispers in his ear for about 15 seconds. Tears appear in this profoundly intellectually and physically disabled boy. His mother asks what he said to her son. The 'Pope' says he described every detail of heaven to him.

We would wonder how 15 seconds would cover this topic.

If you had 15 seconds how would you describe eternal life or Heaven? Jesus did it in 4 seconds. He said that it was to know the only true God. But it was an overall view not in every detail. Have a go at it now. I'll give you a good 15 seconds.

Maybe that's the point. It's not the detail but the relationship we look forward to. Firstly with *the only true God* and then *to know Jesus Christ, the one (God) sent*.

To me, from this aim of Jesus leads on to the others. I usually leave the tricky problem of what heaven looks like or actually is to others. Allan knows 😊. You could read his thoughts at [his page](#). I guess it's a trust thing and we know that lots of things will be made right in heaven. One thing's for certain. There'll be no marriage in heaven. Jesus told us that much. (another smile needed here). But what the view will be like, which music channel we will be listening to, who'll be there and how we will relate – they're all open questions for me. When did this eternal life start? It seems logical to me that it has not obvious start and no end if it's eternal. We're living it now.

Anyway what does lead on from the having a view on eternal life and being able to know God. I think the other things are listed in these 11 verses. They're a great summary of the Gospel

message.

Wanting to listen to God, hear His word to us and then wanting to obey seems quite a natural response when you take an eternal rather than a temporal view. As humans, we're not too good at thinking of long term. Eternity is quite long, but what difference does it make to how we behave here on earth? We know that God knows us intimately and has a plan for us. That plan involves glorifying Him. It's not onerous. It's what we want to do. It's not out of fear but comes from our deepest desires once we know God.

Jesus' last request in this passage, after that the Father keep his followers safe, was that his followers become one. It's not just any old 'being one' but as the Father and the Son are one. Up in the community garden there is a sign which says "Follow the path less travelled". I have come to realise, and it took years (I'm a bit slow), that most of what Jesus guides us to is to follow the path less travelled. This is another example. It seems counter to the world around us that

- we should serve without reward or recognition (in this world anyway)- not even letting your right hand know what your left hand is doing.
- That we forgive a lot – count to 490 before you give up.
- That we accept that others may be fallen as we indeed are – otherwise pick up and throw the first stone
- That we be generous when there are disagreements – when all else fails treat those who are on the other side the way that Jesus would treat them- as he did with tax collectors and sinners.

They're just some thoughts that come immediately that would go a long way to making us one as the Father and the Son are one. You might be able to think of a few others.

'Famous last words' are statements or request that people seem particularly duty-bound to honour. If we look at John 17 and the first 11 versus as Jesus' last words then let's honour them all we can with God's help.

It's probably not something you would share at morning tea but it's never too early to think about.

What would your own famous last words be?