



## JESUS AS THE GIVER OF ΖΩΗ ΑΙΩΝΙΟΣ

**Tosh Thomas**

BA Philosophy

*E-Mail: toshthomas96@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** Life is a major theme in the Gospel of John. The programmatic text (Jn. 20:30-31) pronounces the chief motive of the gospel as to “have life in His name”. The Greek term ζωή αιώνιος, meaning ‘ETERNAL LIFE’ occurs seventeen times in the gospel. It is the rendering of Hebrew term, חַיִּי עוֹלָם (a period without definite beginning or end). Ζωή doesn’t refer to natural life (yuch,) which has death as end. John uses this imagery in reference to the life that a believer gains by believing in Jesus. The importance of ‘life’ is evident from the fact that it is mentioned both in the beginning (Jn. 1:4) and the end (Jn. 20:31) and so forms an inclusion for the whole gospel. Eternal life is a partaking in the life of God. The only qualification that goes with ζωή in the gospel is αιώνιος, usually translated as ‘eternal’. But even in places where he uses life without the adjective αιώνιος, he means the same as eternal life. Αιώνιος in the gospel, indicates not only an infinite duration in the temporal sense, but also a qualitatively new life which even death cannot destroy. This academic paper is an attempt to study Jesus as the giver of eternal life.

Key Words: Life, Jesus the Life Giver, Eternal Life, Life in the Gospel of St John

### 1. Introduction

Life is a major theme in the Gospel of John. The programmatic text (Jn. 20:30-31) pronounces the chief motive of the gospel as to “have life in His name”. The Greek term ζωή αιώνιος, meaning ‘ETERNAL LIFE’ occurs seventeen times in the gospel. It is the rendering of Hebrew term, חַיִּי עוֹלָם (a period without definite beginning or end). Ζωή doesn’t refer to natural life (yuch,) which has death as end. John uses this imagery in reference to the life that a believer gains by believing in Jesus. The importance of ‘life’ is evident from the fact that it is mentioned both in the beginning (Jn. 1:4) and the end (Jn. 20:31) and so forms an inclusion for the whole gospel. Eternal life is a partaking in the life of God. The only qualification that goes with ζωή in the gospel is αιώνιος, usually translated as ‘eternal’. But even in places where he uses life without the adjective αιώνιος, he means the same as eternal life. Αιώνιος in the gospel, indicates not only an infinite duration in the temporal sense, but also a qualitatively new life which even death cannot destroy.

### 2. Father as the Author of Life

God, the Father possesses life in its fullness. This defines the innermost essence of His Being. It is He who sends His only begotten Son to give them eternal life by his being “lifted up” on the Cross (Jn. 3:15-17). The God who possesses eternal life is the transcendental Father who remains invisible and unapproachable (Jn. 1:18). For the Evangelist, Father stands behind the plan of salvation that is revealed by the Son. The Father has set His seal on the Son (Jn. 6:27) thus, confirming the work of the Son who gives eternal life. Father is the author of eternal life, who not only initiates the Son’s activity in the world but also remains present in all that the Son does (Jn. 14:10-11).

### 3. Authority of the Son

Though the Jews often referred to God as Father (Jn. 8:41), Jesus claims a unique and exclusive relationship with God as His own Father (πατέρα ίδιον – Jn. 5:18) since eternity. Such a relationship presupposes an equality with God. Therefore, the Son too possessed life as the Father.



The Prologue presents the *Logos* as the source of life. (Jn. 1:4). Jesus shares the divine prerogatives of giving life and executing judgement to the humankind (Jn. 5:26-27). His authority over life is evident in the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11). The words of Jesus contain eternal life (ρήματα ζωής αιωνίου – Jn.6:68). The evangelist portrays the self-revelation of Jesus as, “I am (εγώεμι) the resurrection (ανάστασις) and the life (ζωή)” (Jn. 11:25). To Thomas, He says, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6). The verse continues to convey that Jesus is the only way to the Father, the source of eternal life (ουδείςέρχεται προςτον πατέρα ειμηδί’ εμού).

#### 4. Gift of Life and Holy Spirit

The fourth gospel presents Jesus as the bearer of the Holy Spirit (πνεύμάγιον). Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:32-33). The servant of God in the Old Testament is filled with the Spirit (Is. 42:1). The baptismal scene confirms this by the action of descending (καταβαίνον) and remaining (μενειν) of the Holy Spirit. He promised to send the Spirit to guide and instruct the disciples (Jn. 14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26; 16:7). He fulfilled this in the post-resurrection encounter when He breathed upon them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22). Thus, Jesus the giver of life is also the giver of Holy Spirit. In His conversation with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:5-8), Jesus talks about birth from above (άνωθεν) as an activity of the Holy Spirit (πνεύμά). Just as natural life relates to breath (Gen. 2:7), eternal life relates to the breath of the Holy Spirit. In the end of Eucharistic discourse, Jesus says, “It is the Spirit that gives life” (Jn. 6:63). The Father and the Son have equally important roles in sending the Spirit (Jn. 14:16 and 15:26). The giving of the Spirit lays foundation for the new community of the believers. Thus, eternal life given by Jesus, is a life in the Spirit.

#### 5. Faith in the Son leads to eternal life

The divine life of the Word (λόγος) was the light of the people (φωστων ανθρώπων – Jn. 1:4). The gospel invites the readers to believe in the One whom God has sent as a means to attain eternal life (Jn. 1:12, 3:16, 6:29,

20:31). Those who refuse to believe prefer darkness over light (Jn. 3:18-21). As Jesus Himself fulfils the will of the Father, so also, the believer must fulfil the will of God by obeying the commandments (εντολή) (Jn. 6:39-40, 12:29, 14:24). This shows a concomitance between faith and obedience. By obeying the commandments, one abides in God’s love and thus, receives Trinitarian indwelling in him (Jn. 14:21). If Jesus is the manifestation and the giver of this divine eternal life, then humans must respond to it by believing (πιστεύειν – Jn. 3:16, 6:40, 20:31), following (ακολουθειν – Jn. 8:12) and dying to self (αποθνήσκειν – Jn. 12:24-25).

#### 6. Realized eschatology

In John, eschatological fulfilment of eternal life is a present possession. While the Synoptics point towards a future Kingdom of God, John present eternal life as already fulfilled in the believer. “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (Jn. 7:38). The one who believes in Jesus has already passed from death (θανάτος) and is free from judgement (κρίσις) (Jn. 3:18, 5:24). Thus, the one who believes, shall live. To the believers, Jesus has already given the glory (δόξα) that He had since eternity (Jn. 17:24). Hence, for John, faith in Christ realizes the eschatological hope in a person.

#### 7. Conclusion

The theme of eternal life is marked by the centrality of Jesus Christ. The Son of God became man so that He may give life in abundance (Jn. 10:10). This eternal life is communicated to the believers through his own death. By receiving Jesus, man has life and communion with the Father. The Father Himself is the source of eternal life, but He has sent his own Son into the world to give life to all who believe in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the one who possess the Son, possesses eternal life. This is clear in the Epistle of John, “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 Jn. 5:11-12).



## 8. Bibliography

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