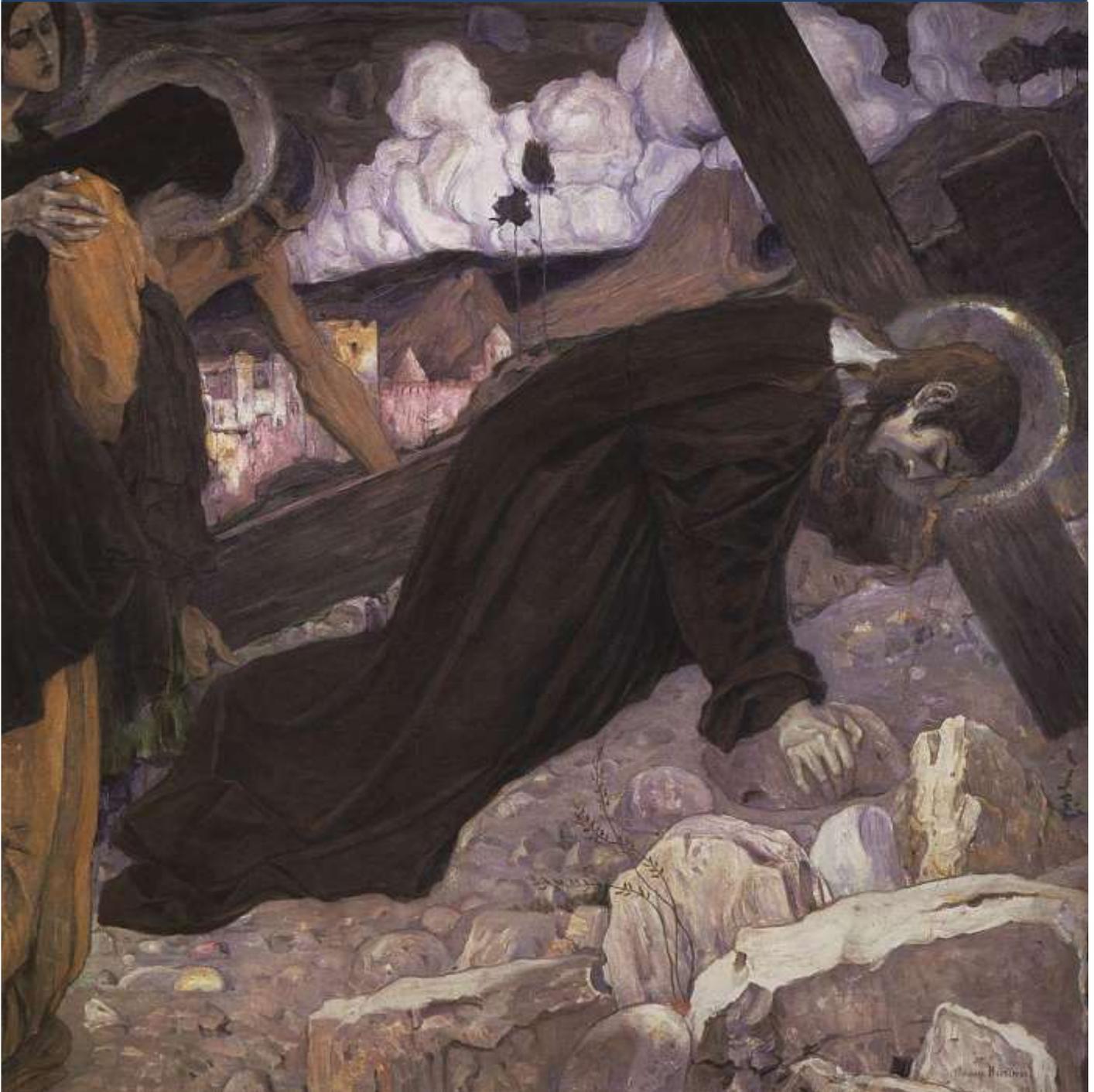


issue 76  
MAR  
2018

# from death to life in 5.24



## **In this Issue:**

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**“You will not die forever”**: What did Jesus mean? by Dr. Glenn Peoples

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**SPEAKER:** Warren Prestidge

**TOPIC: CHRISTIANS FOR HOPE**

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## Production

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# A Dead End

by Warren Prestidge

{From Chapter Five: The Path to Immortality from Life, Death and Destiny}

The so-called immortality of the human soul is a dead end solution to the question of human death.

For three reasons.

(a) The idea of the immortality of the soul makes no sense. It treats our bodily self as if it were unnecessary to our real personality. The Bible, on the other hand, consistently sees us holistically, as unified beings, and our bodies as essential to our

personhood. The same is true of most modern scientists, doctors and psychologists, of course. As Malcolm Jeeves has written: "...any view of human nature that fails to recognise the psychosomatic unity of the person is a view that cannot be defended from science."<sup>1</sup>

Today we recognise that each person is a psychosomatic unity. So does the Bible, throughout. Our whole self is the object of God's saving action (I Thessalonians 5:23). That is why Paul instructs the Corinthian Christians, "Your



bodies are members of Christ” (I Cor. 6:15), and exhorts the Roman Christians to “present your bodies...to God” (Rom. 12:1). The body is integral to, and inseparable from, the self. In fact, it is one way of referring to the whole person. J. A. T. Robinson explains:

“The soma, or body, is the whole psycho-physical unity....” In fact, “It is the nearest word in Greek for ‘personality’....”<sup>2</sup> G. E. Ladd sums up the best of modern biblical scholarship on this point: “...such terms as body, soul, and spirit are not different parts of man as in Greek dualism, but are simply various ways of viewing man as a total entity.”<sup>3</sup>

So since we are, in reality, indivisibly psychosomatic, the hope of the survival of the “soul” or “spirit” is not only inconceivable, it is no hope at all, but a counsel of despair, a desperate, self-destructive delusion.

(b) The idea of the immortality of the soul is unfounded. Death, as the Bible itself repeatedly insists, is exactly what it appears to be: real.

Can we really accept so-called near death experiences, for example, as

evidence to the contrary? The fact is, that there is mounting scientific evidence that such experiences have entirely this-worldly explanations. For example, a recent study by a team led by Kevin R. Nelson, published in *Neurology*, has found that the phenomenon of REM intrusion, where aspects of the dream state of sleep spill over into wakefulness, could well hold the key to “near-death” experiences also.<sup>4</sup> In any case, such experiences offer evidence relevant to the subject of soul-survival only if they actually occur after death, not “near” death. This means that, to take such experiences into account, we must also seriously accept that modern medicine can and does actually bring people back from the dead! After careful consideration, John W. Cooper, who is no conditionalist, has written:

Even if experiences of the transcendent do involve the ecstasy of the soul, it is not clear that they provide us any information about existence after death. For how do we know that when people really die, that is, when they do not come back to tell about it, their experience is the same as near-death experience? ...the

conclusions about the afterlife drawn by popular and occult writers on the basis of near-death experiences are really unwarranted.<sup>5</sup>

As for the evidence of visions, relied upon in some popular Christian literature, the Bible itself clearly warns against relying upon any such thing, without full corroboration from Scripture itself. Jeremiah is rather terse on the subject:

What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord.<sup>6</sup>

Can we rely upon philosophical arguments in support of soul-

immortality? On the contrary, an increasing number today find it simply incredible. In a classic work of Christian theology, O. C. Quick, former Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, explained:

Doctrines of immortality are... constrained either to argue that death is no more than a delusive appearance, or else to divide man's psycho-physical organism very rigidly into two parts, body and soul, the one destined to perish, the other immune from death. The advance of human knowledge has proved unfavourable to both expedients. The notion that death is an illusion can be safely left to Christian Science. And, as to the



second alternative...Everything in ourselves which we would claim to be immortal turns out upon examination to be wholly bound up with mortality; and no philosophy or faith which seeks to escape this factor or finds exceptions to this law, can any longer prove convincing to the candid mind.<sup>7</sup>

(c) The idea of the immortality of the soul detracts and distracts from faith in God. The biblical reality is, that our salvation is from God alone. It is not our achievement, nor inherent in our own nature. It is the most dangerous delusion to seek salvation within ourselves or our world.

It is astounding how faith in God and belief in the immortality of the soul have become conflated in people's minds. Such confusion stems from Platonism, not from Scripture. Even John Calvin argued that we could have no knowledge of God at all unless we ourselves had immortal souls.<sup>8</sup> The Apostle Paul thought otherwise! It is precisely when we turn our attention from "the glory of the immortal God" to "mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles", that we lose the

knowledge of God.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the Bible directs us away from ourselves to faith in God, "who raises the dead".<sup>10</sup> God alone has immortality (I Tim. 6:16) and power over death.<sup>11</sup>

As Robinson explains, Christianity's doctrine of final salvation properly "rests solely on its doctrine of God and not on its doctrine of man." He continues:

There is nothing in man, however noble, which is not subject to death and by nature corruptible. 'All flesh is grass and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass.'<sup>12</sup> 'Ye shall not surely die' – the basis of the Platonic hope – is the first lie recorded in Scripture.<sup>13</sup> Everything in man is finite and must return to dust – 'but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever'.<sup>14</sup> The essence of man and his personality according to the biblical view rests in nothing in himself but in the fact that he is called into existence in a certain relationship to God. It is this 'word', spoken to him and to which his life is required to answer, that is eternal....<sup>15</sup>

## References

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Jeeves, "Mind Reading and Soul Searching in the Twenty-first Century", in Joel B. Green (Ed.), *What About the Soul*, p.30. Jeeves explains his psychosomatic view succinctly thus: "There is duality, but

not dualism; the ontological reality of 'person' is primary and is neither mental nor physical." He adds: "...such a view resonates with well-founded theological, biblical, philosophical, and pastoral views of the person. What is urgently needed is, first, a spelling out of this view as a reaffirmation of the Hebrew-Christian account of the person; and second, a sustained attempt to think through and apply this view to the Christian life both individually and communally."

<sup>2</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, *In the End, God...*, p.85. See further in Chapter Ten.

<sup>3</sup>G. E. Ladd, *The Pattern of New Testament Truth*, Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1968, p.103.

<sup>4</sup>Reported in *The New Zealand Herald*, Wednesday, April 19, 2006, p.A13. "During REM [rapid eye movement] sleep," reported the Herald, "visual centres in the brain are highly active, while the limb muscles are temporarily paralysed. So REM intrusion during peril could promote the visions of light and sensation of 'being dead' that people often have during a near-death experience." Furthermore, a study of 55 people who had had a "near death" experience found that 60 per cent had also experienced REM intrusion at some time, compared with 24 per cent from a control group. The suggestion is, "that the brain's arousal system predisposes some people to both REM intrusion and near-death experience".

<sup>5</sup>J. W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting*, p.235.

<sup>6</sup>See Jeremiah 23:25-32; also Paul, in Colossians 2:18-19.

<sup>7</sup>O. C. Quick, *The Christian Sacraments*, London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., (1927) 1948, pp. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup>Institutes of the Christian Religion I.xv.2.

<sup>9</sup>Rom. 1:21-23.

<sup>10</sup>II Cor. 1:9, Rom. 4:16-22.

<sup>11</sup>John 5:21, 26; Rev. 1:17-18. See further Chapter Ten.

<sup>12</sup>Isaiah 40:6.

<sup>13</sup>Genesis 3:4. The speaker is the serpent!

<sup>14</sup>Isaiah 40:8.

<sup>15</sup>J. A. T. Robinson, *In the End, God...*, p.80.



**Warren Prestidge (M.A., B.D. Hons) was a Baptist pastor for over 20 years. Since 1981, he has pastored churches in Auckland and also lectured for the Bible College of New Zealand and Tyndale College. For two years he directed a Bible College in the Philippines. He authored *Life, Death and Destiny*. Warren and Jackie have three adult sons and nearly six grandchildren. He authored [Life, Death and Destiny](#).**

# The dead will hear, and come out

by Jefferson Vann

The significance of Jesus' promise to raise the dead in John 5:21, 24-29.

“ ‘And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants’ “Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgement but has passed from death to life..” “Truly I tell you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he has granted to the Son to have life in himself. And he has granted him the right to pass judgement, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of condemnation.”<sup>1</sup>

We have been surveying the use of the Greek word ζωή (life) in John's Gospel. We first looked at an author's commentary in John 1:4, and saw that already in scripture,

the idea existed of a coming light in the form of a person: a son, a gift from God who will bring life to his dying people, and deliver them from darkness and death.<sup>2</sup>

Next, we visited Jesus by night, along with Nicodemus, (John 3:1-21) and learned that this gift would be God's own Son, who would be lifted up like the desert snake,<sup>3</sup> so that the ones believing in him might have permanent life.<sup>4</sup> But those who do not believe will be condemned. Jesus did not go into detail with Nicodemus about the nature of that condemnation, but Nicodemus knew the fate of those Israelites who did not look in faith at the desert snake. They rejected the remedy. They died. They never made it to the promised land.

Then, we looked at the words of John 3:31-36, where we discovered there are two kinds of people. There are the believers (ὁ πιστεύων) in Christ, and the rejectors (ὁ ἀπειθῶν) of Christ. Only the believers will receive permanent life (ζωή αἰώνιος). The

rejectors await God's wrath, which will destroy them.

John 4:1-26 is the next time we encounter ζωή. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she could have something called "living water" (ὕδωρ ζῶν).<sup>5</sup> Jesus is talking about that permanent life (ζωή αἰώνιος) that he had mentioned to Nicodemus.

Today's passage is John 5:21, 24-29. Jesus had just healed a lame man, but it was on a Sabbath, so the legalistic hypocrites commenced to systematically oppose and persecute him.<sup>6</sup> They excused this behaviour because they felt that Jesus had asked for it by calling God his Father, thus making himself equal to God (ἴσον τῷ θεῷ).<sup>7</sup> Jesus' response to



Jesus and Nicodemus by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Public domain

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that claim was nothing short of amazing. He said that he would prove his relationship to God and his identity by doing something that only God can do:

And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants.<sup>8</sup>

All of the claims that Jesus made about himself (like the seven I Am statements) are believed by true Christians. But the skeptic might say “where is your proof for all this faith?” The truth is, our proof is based on something that Jesus is going to do in the future. It hasn’t happened yet. Jesus promises it in such a way that for him it is a “done deal.” He speaks of believers having permanent life (ζωή αἰώνιος) as a present possession.<sup>9</sup> But, in today’s text we discover that Jesus must pass judgement before believers may receive their resurrection of life (ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς).<sup>10</sup>

Jesus speaks of an hour (ὥρα) which is coming, and now is.<sup>11</sup> That is the hour in which people have an opportunity to hear the voice of Christ and respond to the gospel. He’s not talking about the

resurrection there. He’s talking about our present opportunity to receive the promise of the resurrection.

But then, Jesus speaks of another hour (ὥρα), which the CSB translators render as a “time,” which will happen in the future. Jesus does not say that this time “now is” as he had when he was talking about the first “hour.” In fact, he tells us that this time will not begin to happen until all the dead who are in their graves will hear his voice, and come out.

Strong has called the first hour the spiritual resurrection, and the second the physical resurrection.<sup>12</sup> That may be going a bit too far. I agree with Geisler that “Paul’s writings and the rest of Scripture teach plainly that believers are not resurrected until Christ returns again.”<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that two separate times, and two separate promises (and not two resurrections) are in view. As Marianne Meye Thompson puts it, “while the promises regarding life in 5:25 envision a time that is coming and is now here, the promise regarding

resurrection in 5:28-29 envisions a time that is coming but is not here.<sup>14</sup>

My point is that they are both promises from Jesus. As such, it is up to us to believe Jesus that he has given us new life today, and that he will raise us from the dead so that we can begin living that new life when he returns. But both promises are paired together in this text because you cannot have one without the other. There will be no one who will be raised from the dead on that hour which is to come

and given permanent life who has not accepted the promise of that permanent life during this hour which now is.

But Jesus makes another distinction in this text which is just as important. He plans to raise all the dead (πάντες οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις), even those who have refused to hear his voice during this hour. As such, those who are thus raised and have not believed in him in this life are raised for the purpose of being condemned (εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως). What is the



Christ and the Woman of Samaria by Anon. Public domain

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nature of that condemnation? If you have not received the promise of permanent life, the only other option is permanent death. The Bible calls this condemnation the second death.<sup>15</sup>

Going back to this passage in John's Gospel, note that there were two kinds of people being pointed out – those who responded to Jesus' words and miracles by believing in him, and those who chose not to believe in him. Jesus warns his listeners that a time is coming in which no one will have the option but to hear his voice. Everyone will rise at his command. The difference will be what kind of resurrection we will experience. Only those who accept his promise of life today will receive the fulfilment of that promise when he returns.

## References

<sup>1</sup> John 5: 21, 24-29 CSB.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 9:2,6.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 21:4-9.

<sup>4</sup> ζωή αἰώνιος

<sup>5</sup> John 4:10.

<sup>6</sup> John 5:16.

<sup>7</sup> John 5:18.

<sup>8</sup> John 5:21 CSB.

<sup>9</sup> John 5:24.

<sup>10</sup> John 5:29.

<sup>11</sup> John 5:25.

<sup>12</sup> Strong, Augustus Hopkins. Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1909), 1014.

<sup>13</sup> Geisler, Norman L. The Battle for the Resurrection. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 211.

<sup>14</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, The God of the Gospel of John. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2001), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. 2:11 "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death." CSB; Rev. 20:6 "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years." CSB; Rev. 20:14 "Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire." CSB; Rev. 21:8 "But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars – their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." CSB.



**Jefferson Vann is a Christian missionary, church elder, father of three, grandfather of five, and a very grateful citizen of God's kingdom.**

**You can find his writing at [JeffersonVann.com](http://JeffersonVann.com), [Marmsky.com](http://Marmsky.com) and [Afterlife.co.nz](http://Afterlife.co.nz)**

# “You will not die forever”: What did Jesus mean?

By Dr. Glenn Peoples

Did Jesus say that believers would never ever die, indicating that even when their bodies die, they will live on with him in glory? You might have heard that, but what if he meant something different, promising that we would be spared the fate of disappearing into death forever?

I get some resistance to the biblical

concept that human beings are frail and mortal, “dust of the earth,” that we return to the dust when we die, and that there’s no heavenly life to be had while our bodies lay in the grave awaiting the resurrection of the dead. Sometimes people even pit Bible verses against this biblical idea. One verse at a time, I think we can



see that these objections fail, and the overall clear biblical portrait of human nature and death remains intact.

One of those objections comes from a particular interpretation of Jesus' saying after raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11:25-26:

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even though he dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Never die... That gives pause to some people when they consider my view that immortality is received at the resurrection and that the dead are really dead in the grave, not living on as immortal souls. They wonder if this claim by Jesus must mean that if we live and believe in him now, we cannot lie dead in the grave without our souls living on in glory, because we will "never die."

It's a good question to ponder, but there's already a reasonable response to this worry, quite apart from the observation I'll make soon. Jesus is here talking about

those who live the new life that he has just referred to: Whoever believes in me, even though he dies, will live - that is, via the resurrection. So when Jesus goes on to say "whoever lives and believes in me will never die," he's talking about the life of immortality after the resurrection.

Well and good, this is certainly possible. This falls into line with the way that Jesus unpacks the meaning of having eternal life elsewhere (e.g. John 6:40, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day"). But there's more! Fasten your seatbelt. I'm going to suggest that "will never die" might be the wrong way to translate this saying of Jesus.

There are a couple of words in Greek commonly translated as "never" in the New Testament. they are:

**οὐ μὴ** (ou mē). This is two words. Each part (οὐ and μὴ) is a negative particle, resulting in a strong negative. It means "not," which in many (although not all) contexts means "never." For example (there

are plenty) John 6:35 - "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never (οὐ μὴ) hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never (οὐ μὴ ) thirst." The word "not" works equally well in these instances, and still conveys the meaning of "never." Daniel Wallace explains that at "οὐ μὴ rules out the idea as even being a possibility."<sup>1</sup> Will X, which is possible, actually happen? Nope, οὐ μὴ says that it will definitely not happen.

**οὐδέποτε** (oudepote). This word more strictly means "never." e.g. Luke 15:29, the parable of the prodigal son - "And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never (οὐδέποτε) gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:"

When we read "will never die," we are reading a translation of οὐ μὴ (i.e. will not) plus something extra, and it's that extra part that I want to look at. If Jesus meant that those who believe in him won't die, then "will not die," that is, οὐ

μὴ + "die," should be enough. But that's not what we find when we look beneath the surface.

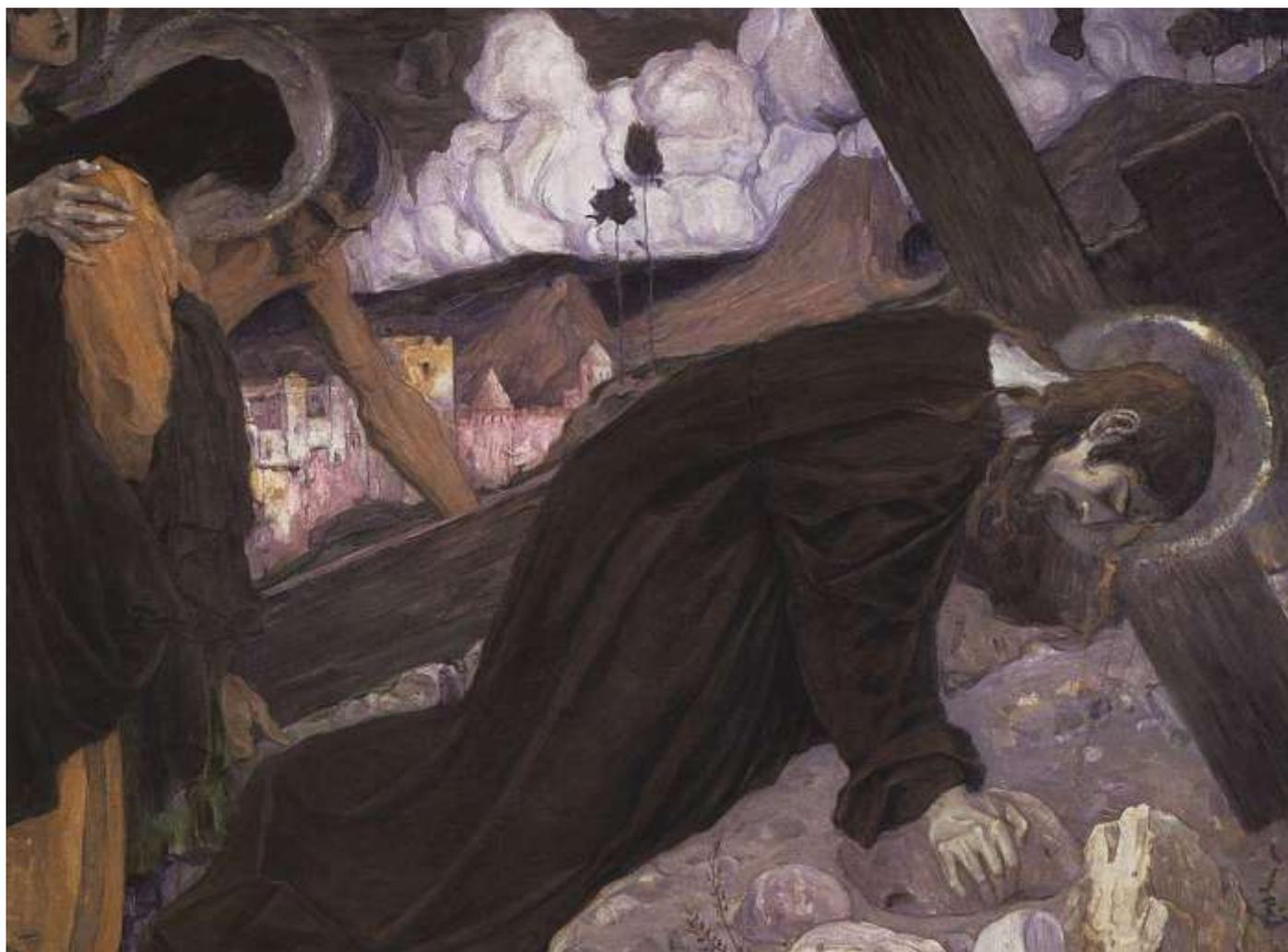
The Greek says that whoever lives and believes in me: **οὐ μὴ (will not) ἀποθάνῃ (die) εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (unto the age, or just "forever")**.

Follow this carefully, reading it more than once if the meaning isn't clear, because this is an important point: In order to say that a person will never die, the Greek need only say that they will not/never (οὐ μὴ ) die. That's because οὐ μὴ is enough all by itself to deny the potential outcome of dying, as Daniel Wallace explained. Will they ever die? No, οὐ μὴ conveys that they will not. Adding εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (to the age, or forever) is not necessary to do this. Indeed, when the same writer, John, elsewhere reports Jesus saying that he is the bread of life so that a person may eat and not die (unlike the manna in the wilderness, which people ate but still died), he says that a person may eat καὶ (and) μὴ (not) ἀποθάνῃ (die) - and not die. There was no need to add

“forever,” because that is already expressed by saying that a person will not die (and in that context, physical death is meant, in order to make the contrast with Israel in the wilderness work).

In fact, nowhere else in the New Testament is the concept of a thing “never” happening by using the phrase “to the age” (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ). That is just not how those words function. This one verse is

treated as a unique case, even though the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα is used elsewhere in the New Testament. Adding εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα invites is to think that it’s not simply dying that believers in Christ will never do. Whoever lives and believes in me will not.... what? They will not *die forever*. Dying forever is a potential outcome. As I have gone to some lengths to show in many places, dying forever is what will happen



Crucifixion, 1912 by Mikhail Nesterov

to those who do not believe in Christ (or at any rate, to those who are finally lost.

This phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα , to the age, is the normal way of talking about doing a thing forever.

Jesus said in John 6 that whoever eats this bread will “live forever” (ζήσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα - “live to the age”).

In fact, John 8:35 shows us exactly what it looks like to deny that something will be the case forever and to affirm that something will be the case forever, and it confirms precisely what I am saying here:

“The slave does not remain in the household forever. The son abides forever.”

What does the slave not do?  
“Remain in the household forever.”

What does the son do? “Remain {by implication, in the household}forever.”

How is it expressed that the slave does not remain in the household forever? The slave: οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. The negative

particle οὐ is not quite the emphatic οὐ μὴ , but otherwise the construction is the same. The slave does not remain in the household to the age. It would be a mistake to read this as though the slave will not remain in the house *at all* or *ever*. He will, but he won't do it forever. By contrast, the son μένει μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα , “remains to the age,” i.e. forever.

Remember, even if Jesus' words meant that a person will never die, it presents no a problem for the biblical portrait of human nature as mortal and death as sleep, because in context he is talking about what happens after the resurrection. But in fact the evidence shows that the translation “will never die” is disputable, and “will not die forever” is probably the intended meaning.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Jesus, even though he dies, he will live, thanks to the resurrection of Christ. And whoever lives and believes in Christ will not die forever. You will be spared that, if you belong to the one who is the resurrection and the life.

The more we look beneath the surface of our Bibles, the more clearly the doctrine of “life only in Christ” seems to be taught!

### **References**

<sup>1</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, 468.



Dr. Glenn Peoples runs “Right Reason”, a popular blog featuring the Say Hello to my

Little Friend podcast on theology, philosophy and social issues. You can also find his writing at [RethinkingHell.com](http://RethinkingHell.com).



Fragment of *Christ Bearing the Cross*, Matthias Grünewald 1523–25

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2. We believe in the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 6:19; Jude 20; Eph. 3:5.
3. We believe that Jesus died for us and gave himself a ransom for all. Rom. 5:8; 1Cor. 15:3; 1Tim. 2:6.
4. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that by resurrection He became Lord of both the dead and the living, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 1Cor. 15:20; John 3:16.
5. We believe that baptism is commanded by Christ, was practiced by His Apostles, and is taught in the New Testament. Mat. 28:18,19; Acts 8:12,38.
6. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Tim. 3:16,17.
7. We believe that human beings are by nature mortal. Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:6-7.
8. We believe that human beings in death are unconscious. Psa. 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5,10. This is likened to "sleep". Job 14:12; Psa. 13:3; Jer. 51:39; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 15:51.
9. We believe that immortality is obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor. 15:21-23; 2Tim. 4:7-8; 1John 5:9-12.
10. We believe that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by the Judgment. Acts 24:15; John 5:25,28,29; Rev 20:12,13.
11. We believe that evil and evil-doers shall be finally destroyed. Psa. 145:20; Mat. 10:28 Rom. 6:21; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8; Rev. 22:3.
12. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1Thes. 4:16.