

## ***“Eternal Life – Inherited”***

The story of the Good Samaritan is a familiar story – and yet, we often miss the main point, highlighted by these words – “Behold, a lawyer stood up to put [Jesus] to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” To properly understand the teaching of the Good Samaritan – you must learn that you cannot do anything to “inherit eternal life” – you can’t do anything to save yourself!

Now, you know this truth, you’ve heard it over and over again – like the lawyer, you know the Word of God. It is God who creates – who saves Noah – who delivers from slavery in Egypt – who grants access to Himself through the blood of the sacrifices – who defeats the enemies – who brings His people into the Promised Land.

You know it, and this lawyer knows it – but our common reaction is to contest this truth. “Does that mean I’m just along for the ride – that I’m totally passive?” YES, when it comes to securing your salvation – Jesus does all the work.

“So, what reason do I have for getting out of bed each day?” Well, God has good use for you. He has given you a life to LIVE – not just a future life with Him in heaven – but living that eternal life, already now!

You get out of bed to live the LIFE that God has created you to live – which is a life lived in FAITH towards God, and in LOVE for your neighbor. The Lord has united you to Himself in Holy Baptism to recreate you – to preserve you – to sanctify you by His blood – to guide and lead you in this LIFE – so that you do not forsake His gift of everlasting life ..... or your neighbor!

Washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, an heir of eternal life – your LIFE is now reoriented – away from yourself and towards God and your neighbor. You receive the Lord’s gifts, the fruits of the earth – all that is needed for body and soul – and you use them, not only for your benefit, but also to benefit and bless your neighbor.

“Who is my neighbor?” Why do you ask? Are you trying to justify yourself like this lawyer? Are you looking to prove that you’ve done what is necessary to be saved? Are you trying to excuse your lack of mercy for your neighbor?

The lawyer wasn’t looking for help to love his neighbor – he’s trying to justify himself before God! He’s standing before God – Jesus who says, “It is finished” with His death upon the cross – but this man doesn’t trust in Jesus alone to save him. His focus is on, “what shall I do?”

“Who is my neighbor?” Well, who is NOT your neighbor? Who does God NOT love? Who is excluded from His mercy? NO ONE. “For God so loved THE WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son .....

The lawyer is looking to put limits on his love for the neighbor. It’s an attempt of his sinful nature to take salvation out of the Lord’s hands and to be active in his own salvation. And the result is that the neighbor suffers – he is passed by – he does not receive love and mercy. And the ultimate result is that he (the lawyer) also suffers – when he does not live by FAITH.

Jesus is teaching us that we are like this lawyer who looks at the one laying half-dead in the ditch and asks – “is this my neighbor, or not?” The priest and the Levite pass by this ditch-dweller as one not deserving of their time, their efforts, their money, their mercy. He is one who might endanger their lives – not a neighbor to be loved.

The thought of getting sidetracked and getting one’s hands dirty and bloody and spending time and money on this “unknown” is offensive to the lawyer – and to all of us who are by nature sinful, and selfish. And if that were not offensive enough – Jesus has the gall to say this it is a Samaritan who comes to this man’s rescue.

Samaritans were despised by the Israelites – half-breeds who had intermarried with the false-worshipping, pagan Gentiles. This lawyer seeks to justify himself as worthy of eternal life – and yet he despises his neighbor, God’s beloved creature – and in so doing, he despises the Lord and His mercy.

Who do you despise? Who do you not love? Who do you strip, steal from, oppress, curse, slander, hate, want to get revenge on, and hold a grudge against?

Jesus teaches us to “go and do likewise” and our only response is, “Lord, have mercy on me” – on me, a self-justifying-lawyer-type dead sinner – a loveless neighbor.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” To love our neighbor – all of them, without limits – is not possible in and of ourselves. It is as impossible as saving ourselves – as impossible as doing something to inherit eternal life.

That is why the Lord has gathered you to Himself – so that you might live by FAITH in Jesus Christ – a faith that lives from the truth that salvation is won by Him alone – and is gifted to you, even now.

Jesus comes to dead sinners and resurrects them as a new man, a new creation – one who lives by FAITH in God, and then also in LOVE for the neighbor. He continually must do this because we are always going back to take credit for our salvation, and limiting our love. He does this to “rescue us from whatever may hurt us” – and so that we may daily rejoice in all the gifts of body and soul that He freely pours out on us.

Who is the neighbor? It is for you, laying half-dead in the ditch – that the Lord Jesus takes the road from heaven to earth – taking on human flesh and getting His hands dirty, and bloodied, and nailed to a cross. His compassion leads Him to become the Despised One – so that He might bind up your wounds – so that you might live.

Today the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses you by His blood – washing away your hatred, your grudges, your lovelessness. He doesn’t leave you dead in your trespasses and sins – and He doesn’t immediately take you to heaven. He resurrects you to a new LIFE – not one spent trying to save yourself – but having mercy on your fellow man.

Dearly beloved, God has had mercy on you – and your hope is laid up for you in heaven. Even now, you have eternal life – in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.