

“The Question of Eternal Life”

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Ahh, the eternal life question – the funeral question. We don’t usually spend much time thinking about eternal life – or ordering our days around this knowledge of eternal life – because we don’t often think about death.

We’re too busy – hurriedly going about our lives – until God stops us dead in our tracks so that we will ponder more than the here and now. He’s like a faithful parent who tries to get their children to think about the long term.

Into the hectic-ness of life – death comes crashing in. A tragic accident that takes the life of someone you know – our loved one is in the ICU. The doctor says the word “cancer” and all you can think about is, “I’m going to die.”

But even then – we tend to focus on death – and not eternal life. We wonder how death will come – will it be painful, will there be suffering – will it come quickly, or be a long, slow trudge to the grave?

There is something about a funeral service that changes our way of thinking. Death is obvious – or should be – because the dead body is right before our eyes. However – the family is sometimes in shock, in denial, in a fog – just trying to get through the day, and the service.

However, the eternal life question should be front and center. It should come up in the sermon – or else it’s just a eulogy, “good words” spoken about the deceased – a looking back at the days of their life.

Well, today we’re going to have a funeral sermon of sorts – yours! Hopefully you are not in shock, or living in denial. Hopefully the Sunday morning fog will not get in the way of hearing your funeral sermon – and pondering your eternal life.

“Good Teacher,” a man says, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” The man addresses the Lord as “Good Teacher” – are you ready to be taught by the Good Teacher about eternal life?

“You know the commandments,” the Good Teacher says – and then lists off all these commandments of the Second Table of the Law – the commandments in which the Lord Himself tells you how you are to love your fellow man.

“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” Really!!?? “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8) Can you imagine saying this about yourself – or the preacher preaching this at your funeral?

To claim we have kept God’s Law – that we have done everything the Lord desires us to do – living a perfect life of love towards our neighbor – is to DECEIVE ourselves – “the truth is not in us.”

I know that if this is preached at my funeral service – there are plenty of people who would want to jump up and object! Catherine would be the first – because more than anyone else – she knows that I have not loved her at Christ has loved His Bride, the Church. My children and siblings would be right behind her with plenty of evidence to the contrary. You would not be out of line to object to such a false statement.

We all have skeletons in our closets. If our true thoughts, words and deeds were revealed – there would be no hope of eternal life. Even the good deeds we’ve done are soiled with selfishness – done because we are concerned with how this will make me look.

What CAN I do to inherit eternal life? Such a question is wrong-headed. It’s living in denial. It is distressing for all who hear such a funeral sermon – because it leaves the question of eternal life unanswered – it gives no certainty.

The man in our text wants eternal life – he wants certainty about his eternal life – but he’s living in denial – so Jesus loves him. He loves him by crushing him – piercing through the falsehood and denial – unmasking his true god – that which he fears, loves and trusts above the one true God.

The question of your eternal life, and your funeral sermon, all come down to a First Commandment question. Do you “fear, love and trust in God above all things”? The one true God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the only Eternal One – and the only source of eternal life.

The man in our text “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” He walked away from Jesus – he walked away from eternal life. He left the funeral service without the certainty of heaven.

Jesus loves this man, even as He loves each one of you. “You lack one thing,” He says, “go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

You may or may not have “great possessions” – and Jesus is not commanding you to sell all that you have – but He is loving you by calling you to repentance. Whether it is your riches, or your good works – any false thing that you would trust to merit eternal life – anything that you would cling to, that you would “fear, love and trust” in place of Him for eternal life --- give it away, get rid of it – deny it, and “come, follow Me.”

That’s faith folks! That’s repenting of your selfishness, your glorification of your good deeds, your thought of attaining eternal life on your own. Denying all false gods – He sets “treasure in heaven” before you – even as He stands before you today – inviting you to “come, and follow Me” in faith.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9)

I’m here to tell you that Jesus forgives all your sin – that He cleanses you from all unrighteousness, because you are baptized into Him. He feeds you with His very own Body and Blood so that you may be certain that what He promises – He gives. He’s faithful to you – giving you the inheritance of eternal life that He has earned for you by His own death and resurrection.

Dearly beloved, don’t walk away sorrowful. Jesus has preached your funeral sermon already – for by faith in Him, you have eternal life already – heaven is yours, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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