

**“How Do I Get Eternal Life?”**

The man had everything that money could buy – and it wasn't enough.  
He had worked hard to be the best person he could be – but there was something missing.  
He had done his best to live a good and moral and religious life – but he wanted more.  
He wanted “eternal life”.

So the first question for us today is "What is eternal life?"  
Whether we call it eternal life, abundant life, life with God,  
the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, or life under God's rule or reign,  
we're talking about one and the same thing.

So, what is eternal life?  
I think that if you asked most people, including most people in our churches, to define “eternal life”,  
they'd say it was the life that begins when our bodies die,  
the life that continues forever into the future.  
We tend to think that we're born, we live, we die,  
and then we enter the next phase of our lives which continues on in time forever.  
We think that way because our minds are very much bound by our concept of time.  
We can't help but thinking of time as a linear, chronological progression  
from past through present and onto future, forever and ever..  
But time only exists in the physical realm – it does not exist in the spiritual realm.  
So as soon as we step out of our physical existence into the spiritual realm,  
there is no more time.  
Now if that's a new concept to you, let me assure you that science – physics – tell us that's true.  
Time can only exist where there is matter and matter can only exist where there is time;  
they are inextricably linked.  
So that means that as soon as our spiritual self loses its physical body in death, there is no more time.  
So all the debates over what happens when you die –  
do you immediately go to heaven or do you have to wait in the ground until the “last day” –  
are pointless.  
Because once you are dead, you have left the physical realm and there is no more time.  
There is just life with God outside of time.

So eternal life isn't something that happens on a timeline at some point in the future.  
Rather, eternal life is something that exists in a kind of parallel universe to our physical world  
all the time.  
Eternal life is simply the spiritual realm where our spirits meet the Spirit of the living God.  
Eternal life is not something that you enter into only after you've died,  
it is something you can enter into right here and right now.  
Because what eternal life is,  
is life with God, an intimate connection with God, an experience of God,  
living under the rule of God, subjecting yourself to whatever it is that God asks of you.

What the man was searching for, what he was seeking, what he desired,  
was the presence of God, the experience of God, a connection with God.

And so he asked Jesus how do I get that? And Jesus answered, "Keep the commandments."

And the man said, "I have".

And then Jesus responds with something strange. He says, "Alright. Then give away everything that you have."

But where is that in the Commandments? There is no commandment that says give away everything you have!

So why would Jesus ask him to do that?

in order to point out to him that the two things that he had said could not both be true.

Think about that for a moment.

If the way to eternal life is by keeping the Commandments,

and if keeping the Commandments leads to eternal life, then something was amiss.

If the man had kept the Commandments he would already have eternal life.

If he didn't have eternal life, then he had not kept the Commandments.

And so Jesus wanted the man to understand

that if he wasn't experiencing eternal life, abundant life, the kind of life he wanted with God,  
then he must not be keeping one of the commandments.

Jesus wanted the man to understand that while he might not take God's name in vain,

while he might keep the Sabbath and honor his parents,

while he might not kill or steal or lie or commit adultery or covet,

there was likely one commandment that he wasn't keeping:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart & all your soul & all your mind & all your strength –  
ALL of your heart and mind and soul and strength".

To have eternal life, to live in the kingdom, to live under the rule of God,

you have to be willing to do anything that God asks you to do.

And if God asks you to give away everything that you have, you must do it.

For someone who is rich that was the supreme test.

And for all of us who have savings,

who don't have to worry about a roof over our heads or where our next meal is coming from,  
this may be our test as well.

Often when we read this passage, however, we get distracted by the money issue,

but while money is certainly a part of it, it's not the whole thing.

When the man came to Jesus, he was searching for the most important thing in the world:

eternal life, the kingdom of God, an ever deepening intimate loving relationship with God.

But you don't get that simply by going to church, or following a set of moral principles, or doing good deeds.

You can go to church every Sunday your whole life, you can keep commandments 2-10,

and you can spend time, talent and treasure serving those in need,

and you can still miss out on eternal life.

Because eternal life is not about what you do; it's about who you love and who you trust.

Let me digress for just a moment and share with you a small God-sighting.

Last week the appointed gospel for the day was in 2 parts: Jesus' words on marriage & his blessing of children.

The appointed gospel for today begins with the rich young man.

Well last week I chose not to read that gospel because the part on marriage is a very difficult text to understand.

Hearing it can cause great hurt to those who have experienced divorce, or those who are gay,  
or those who have been in unhappy or abusive relationships.

So a text that has the capacity to harm should never be read and left to hang out there –  
texts like that need to be addressed in a sermon.

And in this particular case, the subject is far too complex to even cover adequately in a sermon –  
you really need time to discuss it – so I chose not to use that gospel.

But as it turns out, the second part of that gospel reading was about Jesus blessing the children

and that part actually helps explain today's gospel.

So when I realized that, I said, "God you are simply amazing!"

THANK YOU for leading me to not use last week's text so that I could use it today!"

The point Jesus was making when he said,

“whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it”  
and the point he was making when he said,

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle  
than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”  
are one and the same – and both refer back to the first commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength”.

But the word love there means more than agreeing with the intellectual proposition  
that God deserves our gratitude.

What Jesus wants us to understand is that we have to relate to God  
the way a young child relates to a parent.

A young child is totally dependent upon a parent;  
a young child totally trusts a parent; for a young child a parent is their whole world.

As long as we depend on ANYONE or ANYTHING more than we depend on God,  
we cannot experience the kingdom of God, eternal life, abundant life.

It's not a punishment; it's simply cause and effect.

For as soon as we are able to say,

“God, I am going to do what you want me to do, no matter what the cost”,  
then at that very moment we are living in the kingdom.

For one person the idol in their life at a particular time,  
the thing they depend on and put their trust in, might be their bank accounts.

For another person the idol might be a person they love more than they love God.

For another person the idol might be their work.

For another it might be their lifestyle.

For each and every one of us it might be a different thing,  
so the answer is not for every one of us to give away all we own  
or end our significant relationships or quit our jobs or change our lifestyles.

Again, what Jesus is telling us is that it doesn't begin with the “what” but with the “who”.

The man came to Jesus asking for a deeper relationship with God.

Today God invites you into a deeper relationship, and that means spending more time  
worshipping God, learning about God, talking with God, and talking with people about God,

And as we do that, as we come to know God more,

God will help each one of us understand what is getting in the way of our search,  
what it is that we need to give up or put aside or leave behind  
in order to live in the kingdom, to have eternal life, to experience the abundant life.

In the end, it's simply about opening our eyes and ears and minds and hearts  
to a God whose power is boundless and whose love is endless.

It's about saying to that God,

“Thank you for loving me. Help me to know and to love you more.

Teach me to trust you. Teach me to depend on you. Remind me that you are all I need.”

So to close this message I invite you to repeat these words

and to say them from the bottom of your heart:

**“Thank you for loving me. Help me to know and to love you more.**

**Teach me to trust you. Teach me to depend on you. Remind me that you are all I need.”**

May it be so! **Amen**