

## Can We Inherit Eternal Life

A question, as we begin our study of these scriptures today, "Are you confident within your heart and mind concerning the salvation that Christ has wrought within your souls, or do you sometimes, perhaps often, have questions about it?"

There are many, many people, within church settings very much like ours, that have struggles with worries and concerns about their salvation, unable to believe with confidence that though they know they have received Christ as their Savior, that their salvation is truly sure and eternal. It is one of the most difficult and demanding concepts within our Christian experience.

I confess to you that, in my earlier years as a Christian, I personally went through a period of that kind of serious questioning.

And why would such be so? Why would we suddenly begin to question our salvation?

May I suggest that our lack of assurance may be because we really do not fully understand how we have gotten to where we are in our salvation to begin with, what it really took to bring us to our blessed condition of eternal life.

Here in our scripture passage for today, John the Baptist is addressing this very question with his fellow countrymen, the Jews, as they came out to the Jordan river to hear him and be baptized by him. Their understanding of how they would obtain eternal life was by virtue of their "inherited" bloodline, that simply by being a Jew, God would automatically save them eternally.

But such was not the case! And here, John the Baptist was telling them that simply being a Jew was not a guarantee of their eternal life, that something very different would be required of them. Listen again to these words, beginning in verse 7 of Luke chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup>Then he (John) said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>9</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup>So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" <sup>11</sup>He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

<sup>12</sup>Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" <sup>13</sup>And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

<sup>14</sup>Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So, he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:7-14)

In our message last week, we spoke about the response that Jesus gave to a Rich Young Ruler when the man came to Him and asked the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life".

And may we again ask the question that we asked a moment ago about our own personal relationship with Christ? Am I able to believe with confidence that I truly do have "eternal life"? Or, as this young man asked, "What must I myself do to gain eternal life?" "Have I taken all of the steps that God wants me to take to obtain the salvation that He so freely offers in Christ?"

And one question in particular, "If I am truly saved, is my salvation being proven out by my behaviors, by my conduct and by the lifestyle that I live? Can another Christian look at me and easily perceive that my salvation experience is really real?"

As we consider these very serious questions, may I again suggest that the real answers lie within the question that I mentioned a moment ago, the question of what it really takes to bring us to a blessed condition of eternal life.

As we said a moment ago, this young man, the Rich Young Ruler, was not at all sure of what it took for him to have the "eternal life" that he so earnestly desired. Was it perhaps, as these words suggest, an "inherited" privilege, guaranteed by birthright and passed down in the lineage of our parents?"

The title and position that is given to that young man, "Rich Young Ruler", bespeaks the probability that he was well-trained in the ways of the ruling religious groups, the Pharisees or the Sadducees. And his question was very much in keeping with the doctrines being taught by them. It was a deeply held belief among the Jews of that day, and it remains so even today, that the Jews were God's special family, "God's chosen people". And they believed that

merely based upon their Jewish heritage, because they had Abraham's blood coursing through their veins, they would, without question, "inherit" eternal life, much in the same way that they would "inherit" the family farm from their father.

And even further, that even if they did practice sinful conduct in their daily behavior, their special "bloodline" as Jews, along with some prescribed sacrifices, would still save them, perhaps similar in some ways to the way that Christians of today depend upon the "once saved, always saved" provision of their salvation to always pull their sinful feet out of the fire.

But the lessons are clear to us from the many accounts given in the Old Testament, believing that simply having the right bloodline is enough to save a person is misguided thinking and it can lead to great sin and even terrifying days of eternal punishment.

Yes, the Jews were truly God's specially "chosen people", the "children of Abraham", but their heritage did not give them any special privileges regarding sin.

And while the Rich Young Ruler probably firmly believed in an "inherited salvation", it's obvious from his question that God was provoking his mind to question that misguided belief.

And that also is why John addressed the matter "head-on" in his call here for the people to repent. Listen again beginning in verse 7!

<sup>7</sup>Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>9</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:7-9)

Note again those words in verse 8,

<sup>8</sup>Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' (Luke 3:8)

Now, I know that I have said to you often that I personally believe that God has a very special place in His heart for the Israelite people, and I do firmly believe

that, both for the Jews of the Old Testament and for the Jews of our current generation.

But, with that being said, that special relationship, whatever it may be, will never give the Jewish people the freedom to sin and not be held accountable for it. God was, is and always will be "Holy". And He cannot allow His holiness to be violated, whether by strangers or by His very own children.

That is why we read these strong words of warning given here, beginning in verse 8,

<sup>8</sup> . . . do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. <sup>9</sup>And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'" (Luke 3:8-9)

Folks, these words are a clear and unmistakable statement from God that "salvation, and "eternal life" cannot be inherited from our parents". Just because those people were Jews, and their parents and their grandparents were Jews, their heritage did not guarantee them personal salvation.

And that same message must also be clear to you and to me. Because, as strange as it might seem, many people within our modern-day evangelical churches have some of those same misguided beliefs embedded within their souls.

How often have we heard people say things like, "My grandparents were Presbyterian, my parents were Presbyterian and now I am a Presbyterian"? Or my mother was a Baptist, and I grew up in a Baptist church. And every time the church doors opened, we were there"?

Folks, please, accept God's special warning from these words. Salvation and eternal life cannot be "inherited" or passed along from generation to generation. Salvation and eternal life is an individual, special and unique transaction of surrender that must take place between each individual person and the Lord Jesus. Salvation can take place in no other way.

Yes, we can and do "inherit" some things from our parents and grandparents, but unfortunately, that inheritance is of a very different nature. The nature that

comes down from them through their bloodline is nothing more than a wretched and corrupt “sinful nature”.

And that special inheritance, our sin nature, truly is guaranteed . . . no doubt, no exception. We will always inherit a “sin nature” from our parents.

But let me say again, never will that be so with salvation, neither for the Jews nor for any of us. We will never “inherit” salvation from our parents. Salvation and eternal life is an individual, special and unique transaction of surrender that must take place personally between each of us and the person of the Lord Jesus. It can take place in no other way.

With that being said, how then does that special and unique transaction of salvation take place? In chapter 2 of the Book of Ephesians, we read that our salvation is a gift from God, “by grace, through faith” in the Lord Jesus.

And in the Book of Romans, especially in chapter 3, we read that God purchased our salvation through what He calls “justification”, a transaction by which He paid the full and complete penalty for all our sins.

Folks, God's concern for our “sin” is not what we might think it to be. Sin is so abhorrent to God, it must be wiped away and removed from us so completely, that it is as if we had never committed it at all. And to do that, it must be paid for, in full, “propitiated”. And that is only done through the shedding of the atoning Blood of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Only then has our sin been completely removed from our wretched souls, just as if it never happened.

That is “justification”! And our receiving that justification of our souls is what it takes to wipe away all the penalties for sin, the penalties of death and eternal hell, and then brings you and me to eternal life with Christ in heaven.

With words given in Romans chapter 5, God traces for us the steps of how sin first entered into our souls. And there He prescribed for us His special provision of “justification” to overcome our sin. Listen to these words.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . . <sup>18</sup>Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act (the Lord Jesus) *the free gift* came to all men, resulting in justification of life. <sup>19</sup>For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12-19)

Let me repeat these things that I have said again, because you and I need to really know the truth of them. It is as God's words tell us, the "justification" that brings salvation and eternal life can only be gained through the "free gift" that Christ brought to us in His shed blood on the cross. His blood and His blood alone is sufficient to pay the penalty for the debt of our sin. No inheritance from our parents or grandparents, no works of righteousness, nothing else that we could do would be sufficient to pay the debt for sin, only the shed blood of Christ.

Our part in the transaction, our response to God's plan for our "justification" is simple. It begins with this call that John the Baptist is giving. It is first to "repent", to know that we truly are sinners, and that we are no better than a "brood of vipers", continually in violation of God's laws and His plans for us. And to know also that we, in ourselves, have no way of wiping away our own sin, that only Jesus, with His shed blood can do that. And then, after knowing all of that, we are to "surrender" our hearts to Him. That is our part!

Folks, I keep saying over and over again that I fear that our modern-day evangelical brand of salvation is misleading, perhaps even as misleading as believing that our salvation can be inherited from our parents.

To truly believe that we need a Savior, we must first believe that we are a sinner. No, we don't need to know all the doctrine behind sin and salvation to accept Jesus' free gift, but we do need to know why we are accepting Jesus as our Savior. It is because we are sinners, and we can't save ourselves. We need Jesus to save us.

All of the other steps into salvation follow on from that one point. Next, we must simply "believe". And I don't mean "believe with our mind". That is one of the tragic failures of many. The word given in these scriptures for belief is one that expresses a transaction that takes place within a person's heart, not just in their mind.

Belief that takes place in the heart is of a different and more powerful nature. It is faith, true faith, a powerful kind of believing that will cause us to do things that we have never done before. With believing faith, our life and our lifestyle truly begins to change, and we begin to do things like those spoken about here by John the Baptist. We begin to "bear fruit worthy of repentance".

We find a willingness developing within our hearts to share our food, our clothing and our money with others. We begin to want to conduct our business affairs

with others in a more fair way. And we begin to say words to others that we never said before, words of the gospel that might lead them to find what we have found.

Much of the Book of James is devoted to bringing us to this very understanding. There God tells us over and over again that it is not the hearers of the Word of God that are saved. The true evidence of our salvation will be seen as we become “doers” of His Word.

With all of this being said, may I say these words to us again so that there is no confusion about how the salvation of our soul actually takes place.

Salvation cannot come to us merely through our bloodline, as our Jewish friends believe. And neither does salvation come because we are, and have always been, faithful to attend church.

And for our Catholic friends and some of our Episcopalian friends, salvation cannot be conferred upon us through Baptism or some other sacrament of absolution. That simply is not the way God's grace works.

God has a special and specific way that He has designed to bring His chosen ones to eternal salvation. We read about that in Romans chapter 10, beginning in verse 9, Listen carefully to these words!

<sup>9</sup> . . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:9-17)

These words that I have just read are God's plan and design that will bring you and me and anyone else to salvation and eternal life. The only thing that is required of us is believing "faith", and even that "faith" is a gift of Grace from God.

So then, the answer to the question that the Rich Young Ruler asked Jesus is found in these simple truths. And these same truths are the answer for your and my questions about eternal life. And so, I appeal to each of us to not rest until we have it. Listen!

<sup>9</sup> . . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

And from 1 John 5, God tells us . . .

<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:12-13)