

Inheriting Eternal Life

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Introduction.

- A. I suspect that at one time or another, just about every Christian has thought of what it would be like to meet Jesus in the flesh. We've wondered what it would be like to have a conversation with Him, to listen to Him teach, or even just to share a meal with Him. At least, I have, and as someone who counts himself a disciple of Christ, I tend to have a very rosy picture of how things would go.
- B. However, friends, we have to realize that being around the Jesus of the Bible would not always be a pleasant experience. Certainly, Jesus on earth was the embodiment of kindness, compassion, and love, but He was also the embodiment of justice and holiness, and whenever He encountered someone who wasn't living up to those standards, He called them on it. We see one such conversation recorded in Mark 10:17-22—the story of the rich young ruler. He comes to Jesus believing in his own goodness, and leaves with that belief shattered.
- C. Now, this story should certainly make us humble as we consider the sins we ourselves have committed, but there's more to the tale than just that. Even though the conclusion doesn't present him in the best light, the rich young ruler actually starts out by asking an excellent question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" When we understand what's at the heart of Jesus' reply, it becomes clear that both the question and the answer are still centrally relevant to us today. Let's turn to Mark, then, to learn about inheriting eternal life.

I. Do What Is Easy.

- A. The first thing that this dialogue tells us we must do to inherit eternal life is to do what is easy. The text doesn't say so in as many words, but that's the point of Mark 10:19-20. When the rich young ruler asks his question, the first answer that Jesus gives him is a list of commandments: do not murder, commit adultery, steal, and so forth. It's not hard to imagine the response that Jesus got. The rich young ruler hears all these things, brightens up a little bit, and tells Jesus that he's done all those things from his youth up.
- B. Of course, Jesus already knew that the rich young ruler did all of those things. In responding the way that He did, with an incomplete answer, Jesus probably had two purposes. First of all, he wanted to put the rich young ruler off a little bit. He wanted to see how far the man would press in his quest for eternal life. Second, though, and more importantly for us, Jesus' answer was an accurate answer. In order to inherit eternal life, the rich young ruler did need to have been doing all those things he'd been keeping from his youth up.
- C. There's a lesson here for us too. In almost all of our spiritual lives, there are commandments of God that we really don't struggle with obeying. This is not to say that other people don't struggle with those commandments, just that we don't. Let me give you an example from my own life. I was raised by two committed Christians who were guaranteed three-times-a-week attendees at church services. Because of their example and training, I've never really struggled with forsaking the assembly. It's just a moral habit with me.
- D. Does this mean that I should devalue assembling with the saints, or just take it for granted that I'll always find it easy? Absolutely not! In these areas where we don't spiritually struggle, which hopefully make up most of our spiritual lives, we still need to be committed to the general pursuit of righteousness. Look at how Luke defines righteousness in Luke 1:5-6. Righteousness is walking blamelessly in the commandments of the Lord. Parts of our lives where we don't wrestle with temptation much aren't areas where we can just put ourselves on spiritual autopilot. Instead, they should be areas where we strive to walk blamelessly, to imitate God.

II. Do What Is Hard.

- A. Sadly, however, not everything in our spiritual lives comes so easily, and what this parable tells us is required is to do what is hard as well. Look how Jesus responds to the confident statement of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:21. Here is where the ruler finds out what the problem is with asking questions when you're not sure that you'll like the answer. He asked what to do, Jesus told him, but he REALLY didn't like the answer, because he loved his money more than he loved God. He wasn't willing to do what was hard for him.
- B. The application that Jesus makes from this story is about money, but its meaning is far broader than warning us against covetousness. It's a warning for us to look to all of our weak spots, whatever they may be. I'm not Jesus; I don't know what the hearts of men are like, but I would guess that every one of us has at least one spiritual weak spot, someplace where we are vulnerable to the wiles of Satan.
- C. The problem with being vulnerable to Satan is that he knows where the weak spot is and he will attack it. It reminds me of the mosquitoes back in Texas. Up here, we're blessed with not having too much mosquito trouble, but down in east Texas, they joke that the mosquito is the state bird, and Off! is the state perfume. All it takes is one good rain early in the spring, and you have clouds of mosquitoes in the air for the next nine months. Now, mosquitoes aren't very smart. I don't even know whether mosquitoes have brains or not, but I do know they have a certain amount of cunning. They don't land on your shoes and try to bite you through

your shoes. They don't land on your jeans and try to bite you through your jeans. Instead, they go sniffing around for some nice juicy exposed skin, and once they find it, that's where they bite you. Satan is the ultimate mosquito. He doesn't spend a lot of time attacking us where we're strong. He sniffs around until he finds where we're weak—a different collection of spots for every person, and then THAT's where he attacks us.

- D. The apostle Paul describes his experience with his weak spots in Romans 7:14-15. This verse describes the maddening nature of spiritual struggle in a way that's probably familiar to all of us. We know that there's something in our lives that's sinful and wrong, and we determine that we're going to get rid of it, and we do for a while. But then, our attention wavers, and before we know it, we're right back there doing the same wicked thing. That's one way our spiritual weak spots can be. A second way is the way the rich young ruler's weak spot was. Satan knew where the vulnerable place was, but the ruler didn't, so Satan exploited it fully.
- E. A third way, though, combines the worst of the previous two. This scenario comes up when we know what our spiritual weak spot is, but we aren't trying to do anything about it. Most often, this is because we fear the consequences of trying to come out of sin. We think that if we do what's right, it will cost us something we can't live without. Let me give you an example. Back when I was in Missouri, working for the plant science department at the University of Missouri, I had a co-worker. Let's call her Rose. Rose was an extremely religious young woman from an extremely religious family with a denominational background. I liked her a lot. My boss, who was also a Christian, studied with Rose for several years on the subject of baptism. He showed her Scripture after Scripture that plainly showed that baptism was necessary for salvation, but she never accepted it. It wasn't that Rose lacked the capacity to understand. It was that she was so afraid of losing her connection to her family that she never let herself listen. Rose loved her family more than she loved God.
- F. Whatever the situation with our weak spots is, the basic answer is the same. We have to identify them, then we have to keep Satan from destroying us through them. The first part of this requires honest self-examination, but the second part of it requires, more than anything else, faith and courage. Fighting the devil for a lifetime requires great courage, but it sometimes requires even more than that to face the consequences of doing what is right. We need to find that courage. We need to do what God requires, because if we do, God promises that He will take care of us. Look at Matthew 10:29-31. Above all else, we have to remember that we aren't in this alone. God is aware of every moment of every day we live. If we do what is right, even if we don't see how it will possibly work out, God has the wisdom and the power to make it work out.

III. Follow Jesus.

- A. Third, though, brethren, in our struggle to inherit eternal life, we have to follow Jesus. In the story of the rich young ruler, we're quick to spot the first mistake he makes, of loving money more than God. However, we're not so quick to spot the second mistake, which is revealed in Mark 10:22. The ruler didn't just fail the test. That was bad enough. What was worse was that after he failed the test, he gave up.
- B. If he hadn't given up, this would be a completely different story. Imagine with me that the story is the same through Mark 10:21. The ruler still has the flaw of loving money too much. But let's say that instead of leaving, he says to Jesus, "Lord, I can't do that right now. I don't have the attitude toward money that You want me to have. Forgive me, and let me follow You anyway. Let me learn from You, so that someday, I can be the man You want me to be." Can you imagine Jesus turning away the man who said that? I can't.
- C. Before I go on, let me make it clear that I'm not saying that we don't have to repent. I'm not saying that it's ever OK to sin, or that God ever allows us to sin. I am saying, though, that when we deal with our spiritual weak spots, struggle may be the best we can manage, at least for the time being. We may have a mind set on the spirit, but still have flesh that is in bondage to sin. When we find ourselves embroiled in a spiritual battle like this, we must make sure that we don't give up. We must make sure that we continue to follow Jesus.
- D. If we follow Jesus, even though we continue to struggle, God's word promises us two tremendous weapons in our spiritual battle. The first of these weapons is the forgiveness of our sins. John describes it in 1 John 2:1. Even though Jesus wants us never to sin, He will plead our case before the God of heaven if we do and ask for His forgiveness. As Christians, all we have to do is to pray to God in faith, and our sin will be blotted out.
- E. Sometimes, when we're weighed down with loathing for the sins that we have done, this seems like a really cheap out, like we should still have to go do penance or something. We need to see, though, that forgiveness is not based on the work we do; it's based on the work that Christ has done. Even if we spent the rest of our lives attempting to atone for sin, we could never do it. Our help comes through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- F. If we are in Christ, though, there's even more help for us than that. Look with me at the promise God makes through Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:13. God as much as promises us in this verse that we will be tempted, and we will be. God also says, though, that as we are tempted, we will always have a way of escape, so that the temptation will not be too much for us to handle. It may be that through this way of escape our weak spot will become tougher over time and disappear entirely. On the other hand, it may also be that our struggle will continue until the end of our lives, so the way of escape will need to appear until the end of our lives. Regardless of which is true for us, we can be sure that whatever help God gives will be enough.

Conclusion. If you want God's help in your life, come to Him today and seek it.