

SUNDAY, August 25, 2024 “What Must I do to Receive Eternal Life?”

I Corinthians 15:3-11 John 3: 1-21

As we approach the end of August, we conclude this summer’s series “At your Request” with a question that is foundational to the Christian faith—how might one receive eternal life. But before we go about receiving this gift we need to define ‘eternal life’. From the context of our doctrinal faith.

A New Creed states: *In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.* From the Basis of Union which is the foundational document of the UCC, Article XIX. *Of the Resurrection, the Last Judgement, and the Future Life.* States: *We believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, through the power of the Son of God, who shall come to judge the living and the dead; that the finally impenitent shall go away into eternal punishment and the righteous into life eternal.*

These documents make it clear that eternal life is a part of what our church understands to be foundational to our faith. Our focus today is the question what must I do to receive eternal life? What is my investment in my future life? What must I do to experience this promise of God?

Eternal life was first mentioned in Genesis 3:22 with Adam and Eve. God’s intention was that people would live always but as this verse states, "Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.'" Adam and Eve chose to know good and evil so that eternal life was no longer an option. This holds true for all people now—God created us in His image to have an abundant life. But by the choices people make, this often results in us being separated from God no matter what was done against God. Paul writes, “For all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory” Romans 3:23 and “the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

So there is a gap- a separation between each of us and God- sin. And this is when we turn to the story of Nicodemus who needed to ask important questions to Jesus about who he was and what he was doing with and for the people.

John 3 tells of the night encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a leader, a member of the Jewish ruling council, a Pharisee within the group of the Jewish population who were striving to have their people back to follow Moses’ law. Nicodemus was a learned and respected teacher who wanted to check Jesus out for he had heard good things

about this person and he just was not sure about him. Was Jesus a messenger from God and what was his purpose? So as to not raise suspicion they met at night with Jesus took control of the meeting and introduced ideas that left Nicodemus wondering.

Nicodemus complimented Jesus in what he had done already- teacher, performing signs of God. Yet Jesus' response was not a simple thank you! He says no one can really see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. Nicodemus was confused! What was Jesus talking about? Born again-water, spirit, kingdom of God? Jesus thought he should have understood what he was referring to- ie the prophet Ezekiel 36: 25-27 speaks of God cleansing his people with water and giving them his Spirit which is followed by the vision of God raising bones to new life.

With this, Jesus clarifies again what he means by stating that being born again is by water and Spirit. He is not sure whether Nicodemus was a part of God's kingdom in the first place. And so Jesus asks, "You are Israel's teacher, and you do not understand?" Then Jesus gives the story of Moses lifting up the snake in the desert to bring healing just as what will happen to the Son of Man why? So that whoever believes in him, may have eternal life.

Jesus then states the "Gospel in the verse" passage according the John. John 3:16 "For GOD so loved the world that he gave his ONLY begotten SON that whosoever believeth in Him should not PERISH but have EVERLASTING LIFE." Jesus' purpose—to save the world and bridge the gap between people who have sinned and God in order that they may receive the gift of eternal life.

Jesus is God's Son, the Son of Man, the Rabbi, - the one God sent to save people so that they might receive eternal life. But Jesus had to pay the penalty for sin and he did this as per God's plan by dying on the cross. God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21) In Timothy's letter we read that Jesus, is the one mediator between God and people and is the One who suffered and died for us. He was the righteous man who was free from guilt or sin and he took it upon ourselves and brought us to God. God therefore provided the way to bridge the gap between Himself and people—Jesus His Son who died on the cross. But we can't leave Jesus dead in the tomb! He rose from death, conquered it and is alive forever! This is why we praise Jesus' name! Why we glorify God and experience the Spirit amongst us because Christ is alive and there is hope in Him!

But the question asked is this: What must I do to receive eternal life?

WE must trust Jesus Christ and receive him into our lives. Jesus stands and knocks—you know the children’s song: *Behold behold, I stand at the door and knock knock knock... If anyone hears my voice, if anyone hears my voice and will open the door I will come in—(Rev 3:20)*

John 1: 12 “ to all who receives Him, believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” We must believe in Jesus, that he is Lord, that God raised him from death and through this we will be saved and offered the gift of eternal life (Rom.10:9)

There are certain steps to follow: (From Billy Graham.org--- peacewithGod.net)

- 1) Admit that you are a sinner.. ( we are all sinners!)
- 2) Be willing to turn from your sins (change your life around) and ask for God’s forgiveness
- 3) Believe that Jesus died for you and rose from the grave
- 4) Pray that Jesus will come into your life, and you are controlled by the Spirit as you live. That is you receive Jesus.

And once this occurs—you are assured that you are forgiven and that you truly trust in Christ. With this, you receive the eternal life. It is by faith alone only; you can’t earn it, don’t deserve it or get it on merit. Only through faith.

The reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is his faith filled statement about Jesus death and resurrection, his appearance to the disciples and to himself. By the grace of God—in him, Paul is able to proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord and he is experiencing eternal life! And this is what we yearn for – so that one day when our life on earth is ended we will be united with those who have gone before us. This is faith.

In Luke 10 a lawyer stood up to test Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” Jesus was referring to the Hebrew laws of the OT. The lawyer replied, “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 neighbour as yourself.” Jesus- “You have given the right answer; do this and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself he asked Jesus: “But who is my neighbour..” Jesus then tells the parable of the Good Samaritan and questioned the crowd as to who was a good neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? The lawyer answered, the one who showed him mercy. Jesus said – Go and do likewise.

So how do we receive eternal life? By faith alone. Admitting being a sinner, and seeking forgiveness. Believing that Jesus died and rose for you. Asking for Jesus to enter and guide your life with the Spirit and showing mercy to others in love. And this begins with having hope in Christ alone for He is God's Son sent to save us from death, and offers to us life eternal!

But we must choose to follow; to believe and to live for Jesus. Because it is through Jesus we are forgiven! To have peace with God one needs to have Jesus within them and guiding them—not just when it is convenient but always. This is not easy to let go and let God take over but it is worth it all.

To receive Christ or to renew your faith let us come before God in prayer. ....

The words I share may be repeated quietly aloud or in the silence of your hearts for God to hear.

Let us pray:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. I want to turn from my sins and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died for my sins and that You raised Him to life. I want Him to come into my heart and to take control of my life. I want to trust Jesus as my saviour and follow him as my Lord from this day forward. In Jesus' Name, Amen.