

Salvation a Gift

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TEXT—And I give unto them eternal life.—John 10:28.

Jesus Christ said that he had come into this world that men might have eternal life. The bestowal of eternal life was, therefore, the purpose of his coming. A certain young man asked, "Good sir, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Christ's disciples had some conception of eternal life for they said to Jesus, "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

What is eternal life? Jesus himself gave an answer in his great intercessory prayer, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent!" With the ordinary student of the Bible, the idea of eternal life is a life of endless duration, the word "eternal" being made synonymous with "everlasting." But eternal life is not altogether a question of duration but of quality. The proper conception of eternal life embraces both quality and quantity. Terms of inherent value and time measurement must be in mind. The man who possesses eternal life then has something that is far raised above anything that the earth has to offer. It is a life that may be realized this side of death and has its thousands of illustrators in all the world and among all classes of persons without respect to age, race, pecuniary condition, education or social standing.

Now the question arises, presuming the man does not possess this eternal life. How is he to get it? The rich young ruler thought it was by doing something to inherit it, or rather merit it. Probably the vast majority of people have that idea. It is thought man must do something to win eternal life, as a kind of trophy of his efforts, or make himself a worthy recipient of it. Unfortunately, the nobility of man is often appealed to, as if man had something of merit to offer God. Precisely the opposite is the situation. Man must come to the place where he will see his utter helplessness and accept salvation as a gift.

Man is not in a position to have eternal life offered to him, and to accept it or reject it, as in any true sense an equal of the offerer. He is not in a position to deal with God. His standing before God is one of hopeless need. He stands before God as one guilty, unworthy and hell-deserving. The only thing that he can do is to look upon God as offering to him salvation out of his mercy.

The comparison of eternal life with what the best man could do to merit it would be ridiculous. Some conclusion might be readily arrived at with respect to what eternal life means in this life, but as before stated, the value of eternal life beyond is far more than man can calculate.

Besides this, there is already an adequate equivalent to eternal life presented to man in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God, the infinite one, who lived a most marvelous life and died a most wonderful death. It would seem to be something almost amounting to direct insult to God to make any suggestion that man could merit eternal life, when it is clearly proclaimed in the Word that Jesus Christ has already merited it, and stands offering it to us. As the text says, Jesus Christ gives this life, and this because he purchased it with a surrender of his own precious life.

The Word of God emphatically and categorically teaches us that eternal life is a gift. Support to our text is given in that remarkable saying in Isaiah 55:1: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; ye, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Certainly John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" is in place, as also the words of Paul, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The text itself says, "I give unto them eternal life." And another consideration is that those who give evidence of possessing eternal life, are those who concede that what they have has been the gift of God.

This great fact of the Gospel may seem to humiliate man, but nothing is needed more. We are living in an age when men glory in their shame. They demand notice on the ground of merit, and nothing is needed more than something to make man feel his absolute dependence upon God; indeed, feel that he is deserving only of God's wrath and the visitation of his judgment. Whether men think it or not, they are daily recipients of God's gifts. The atmosphere they breathe the sunshine, the continuation of life, the health they possess, are all the gifts of God, for which man can give nothing in return.

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