

“A Mitzvah”
February 3, 2019
Matthew 7:21-20

One day in His travels in Palestine Jesus was met with a question by a man who runs up to him and asks “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Luke 10:25). Now, the man was ruler of some kind; likely a magistrate; certainly a man of influence in the Jewish community. And, according to the Bible, he was very rich.

Now, I’m only guessing here. But the young man must have been a thinker; likely thinking about his life; maybe his responsibilities; his good deeds; maybe his relationship with God.

So, maybe he’d already asked other people he respected the same question. But today, he comes to the best person he can imagine, the Son of Man, with the one question he had yet to find an answer to; “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). (There’s only one other man in the Bible, by the way, who ever asked this same question and he was scribe, a Pharisee, a scholar in the writings of Moses).

But, who here thinks about eternal life? What makes a person think about it? Does anyone ever really think about what you need to do to inherit it?

So, eternal life is today’s subject. What do *you* think when you hear someone use the words “eternal life”? Do you think it’s a destiny? Is it a place to go to after death? Please open your Bible with me to the ninth chapter of the Book of Romans.

As far as we know, there are three kinds of physical life: animal life, plant life, and human life. And then there’s the human being who has a soul and a spirit as well as a body. And then there’s eternal life. But eternal life can’t be physical because, as everyone know, the LORD is an eternal being.

He isn’t physical. He’s not material. So, eternal life is the kind of life God has. And it’s the exact same thing as everlasting life.

So, let me begin here today. We’re born into this world without eternal life. But, at the moment we receive it, we can worship God, whether we’re five years old or whether we’re 95 years old when we receive it. And that’s because Jesus Christ Himself is Eternal Life.

God’s goal has always been to populate His creation with men and women and children who are completely surrendered to Him. And His only recourse to accomplishing this is to give eternal life to anyone who will believe on His Son.

Jesus makes it simple. John 3:15 “*That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have **eternal** life. (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. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” John 3:36 “*He that believeth on the Son hath **everlasting** life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see **life**; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*”

Do you have eternal life? You think about everything you need to do each day of your life. Do you think, like the rich, young magistrate, that if you put in the right amount of effort in doing the *right* things, that you will someday inherit it? If someone asked you to explain it, what do you think you’d say? Is eternal life something you receive after you leave this world? Or, is it the kind of life God has? Is it the kind of life God *gives* to those who believe on Christ at the moment of salvation? Eternal life isn’t something you receive after you die. Jesus said John 3:36 “*He that believeth on the Son has [present tense] everlasting life ...*”

So, I’ve titled today’s sermon “A Mitzvah.” Shall we pray?

First, then, depending upon good works is the most-commonly chosen path to eternal life; Romans 9:30

[Read Romans 9:30-33. "... *stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*"

My main question for today is this. Do you have everlasting life? Turn back just a few pages to Romans chapter six. Romans 6:23 "*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is **eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

According to the Bible, eternal life is quote "the gift of God." You see, it's not physical and it's not material. But, it's freely given, in the exact same way you receive a gift from a friend or relative. And according to Jesus, you receive it when you believe on Him. Can you think of anything simpler; anything more wonderful and, at the same time, astounding? God gives as a free gift His own life, eternal life, to people who put their trust in His Only Son. That's astounding!

So, let's answer the rich, young magistrate's question. Can you do something to inherit eternal life?

Here's what Jesus said to that man. "Have you never murdered; never committed adultery; never stolen anything; have you never lied; disrespected your parents: loved your neighbor?" And the man says "Oh, yes, I've kept those laws since I was a boy." And Jesus responds like this. "Sell everything you own and give the proceeds to the poor. Then you'll be perfect and you'll have a treasure stored up in heaven for yourself."

And the young magistrate, according to the Bible, walked away. Why? Because he knew that he was not willing to give up his possessions if that's what he had to do to find eternal life. He was not at all prepared or ready to listen to or accept what Jesus said.

Folks, depending upon good works is the most-commonly chosen path to eternal life. Yet, eternal life is a gift. It's the *gift* of God to everyone who believes on Jesus Christ. And, in essence, until you are willing to stop trusting

in whatever you're trusting in in this world, you are, in essence, saying that trusting Jesus Christ is not your desire. And really, you aren't truly interested in eternal life.

Now, everyone here likes free things. But, eternal life more than life after death. Eternal life is the same kind of life that God has. And, according to Jesus, it's a Gift to be received.

So, here's my question again. Have you received eternal life?

Another man came to Jesus, a Pharisee. His name was Nicodemus. And Jesus told him that he had to be born again. Otherwise he'd never see the kingdom of God. And Jesus went on to explain that, at the moment he was born again, he'd have the gift of eternal life. You see, they're one and the same.

So, what's on my heart today? "Ye must be born again." Think about your own life. At the very minute you were physically born, you received physical life. And at the very minute of your spiritual birth, your salvation, you received eternal life.

Eternal life, as I said, is the same kind of life God has. It's not just a long period of time outside this physical, material world.

God's *life* is eternal life. It indestructible life. The eternal life within you is the exact same kind of life the trinity has. And that eternal life comes into your spirit at the moment you stop trusting whatever you've got your greatest reliance upon today and begin to trust in the One Person Who will never steer you wrong.

So, here's my question today. Have you received eternal life? Jesus says that everyone who believes on Him has, present-tense, right now, has this indestructible, God-kind-of-life.

You see, everlasting life isn't physical life. It's not even time-life. It's eternal. And there's no time in eternity. It's that wonderful life you receive at the moment you come into a relationship with Him, God, the Father through God, the Son.

And, at least three problems are solved for you and me at the moment you are saved. One, your relationship with God. Salvation, receiving the gift of eternal life, moves us into the family of God. You now have God as your Father. To have eternal life is to have a one-on-one, Father-child relationship with God.

Second problem removed; eternal life solves the problem of our condemnation because of our sins. We were born in sin. We sinned by habit and by choice. It was our constant will and desire to sin. But, from the very first minute of your salvation, you no longer stand condemned before God.

Third problem removed; your need for eternal life. You are given a free gift at the moment you trust in Jesus. That gift is everlasting life.

So, why am I asking if you've received eternal life? Here's why. Because eternal life is not something to achieve and it's not something you can work for.

Now, it's likely that you've heard or read the terms "Bar-Mitzvah" and "Bat-Mitzvah." And what's a mitzvah? Please look again at Romans chapter nine and I'll show you. Find the thirtieth verse and follow with me.

Romans 9:30 *"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to [received] righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. (31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? [Why?] Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; (33) as it is written (in Isaiah 8:14), Behold, I lay in Sion a*

stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

Salvation and eternal life are received at the moment you trust in Christ. But one more thing you received at salvation is righteousness. When you trust in Jesus as your personal LORD and Savior, God counts you as righteous. And so, when I ask if you've received eternal life, I'm also asking if you stand righteous before God.

You see, whether you're an Orthodox Jew or a Conservative Jew, you likely believe in Heaven. Now, how are you to get to Heaven if you're Jewish? A Mitzvah. This is a Hebrew word for "good works" and it comes from the Hebrew word Mitzvoth, meaning "commandment or obligation." Actually, there are 613 Mitzvah's. *Quote "A person must somehow or other fulfill all the mitzvahs in order to have the complete connection to G-d."* [Found on https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/-article_cdo/aid/1287922/jewish/Fulfilling-All-613-Commandments161.htm by Rabbi Perets Auerbach]. Anything you do to benefit someone else is a Mitzvah. If you do a Mitzvah and you pray, you will one day enter Heaven.

Can you see how this is the exact opposite of what both Jesus and Paul say about eternal life? And, can you see why I'm asking you if you've received the *gift* of eternal life?

There's a huge difference between receiving the *gift* of eternal life while you live in this world on the one hand and, on the other hand, trying to do something to get you into a right relationship with God. If you receive a gift, no payment is required. You don't *do* something, you don't do *anything* to deserve a gift. But, if you consider Heaven to be a reward for your good works, then you're counting Heaven as the payment God must give you for doing good deeds; for doing Mitzvahs.

Now, does Paul mention a mitzvah? Well, since it's a Hebrew word, it won't be found in the New Testament. But

look again at verse thirty-one. Romans 9:31 *“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”*

There’s one nation that still stands today unique among the nations of the world. That’s Israel. And that’s because God revealed Himself to the human race through Israel. God, according to the Old Testament, is the God of Israel.

He gave His Word, the Bible, to the Jews. All, but one of the writers of the Bible are Jewish. Yet, to this very day, the typical Jew believes that you can achieve righteousness and gain eternal life, not by faith alone, but through good deeds; by doing many mitzvahs.

Here are ten things people everywhere, both Jews and Gentiles, believe you must do in order to gain eternal life.

- Keep the 10 commandments
- Don't do the “really bad” things
- Give to charity
- Be a good citizen
- Bring up a good family
- Read your Bible
- Pray
- Attend Church or Synagogue
- Be baptized, confirmed or “Bar-Mitzvah-ed”
- Be an honest attorney

You see, depending upon good works is the most-commonly chosen path to eternal life.

But, what does God say? He says “look at the difference between good works and faith.” Notice once again Romans 9:30 *“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. (31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.”*

Is there anyone anywhere who is opposed to good works? No, not any reasonable person. But, when it comes to achieving righteousness before God, when it comes to gaining eternal life and a place in Heaven, good works actually stands in the way. How many people in your life do you know who really *do* think that faith in Jesus Christ is the basis for salvation? Most of the people you and I know think that good works is the basis for salvation.

Yet, here’s the Greatest of the Jews, Jesus Christ, speaking about good works. Matthew 7:22 *“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils [demons]? And in thy name done many wonderful works? (23) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

John 6:28 *“Then said they unto him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? (29) Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he [the Father] hath sent.”*

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.”*

And here’s a word from the Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah, on your good works. Isaiah 64:6 *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses [good works] are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”*

Now, some here today think that their good works will bring them to the LORD. So, that’s why you need to hear and answer the question, Have you received eternal life?

If there is one major distinction between the teachings of Jesus and Paul versus those who are quote “trying their best,” whether Jew or Gentile, it’s this.

Now, please find with me Galatians 2:16.

Galatians 2:16 *“Knowing that a man is not justified [made righteous] by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”*

Galatians 2:21 *“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”*

Galatians 3:11 *“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.”*

The only way to find righteousness with God is by faith. Anything else is man-made religion. By the way, every religion on earth is works-based, man-dependent, and good deeds religion.

And all of the world's major religions base their salvation on what you do, not what you are, and not what God has done in Christ.

For example, what does Islam teach? Muslims are required to say certain words each time they pray and they must say them five times a day. They have to give alms. They have to observe the fast of Ramadan. They have to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. And when you get to the gate of paradise, you will be judged. Here's a quote from the Koran.

“Those whose scale [of good works] will be heavy, will prosper: Those whose scale will be light will find their souls in perdition” (Surah 7:8, 9).

And, what's especially significant in Islam is this. They deny that Jesus died on the Cross. This comes from the Koran at Surah four. *“And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain”* (see Qur'an 4:157-159).

So, if you deny that Jesus died on the Cross for your sins and if you are trusting your good deeds, then you have no eternal life.

And what about Hinduism? Hinduism claims that there are 330 million gods; all of these gods must be appeased. Hindus have created something called karma and karma determines how you'll be born in your next life. And also, if you are a Hindu, your aim is to achieve a stage of no suffering. How? By doing lots of good works and by practicing yoga, because yoga moves you out of the physical realm and connects you to Brahma. And, after you die, you will be quote “incarnated” into another level of life.

Then, there's Buddhism. If you're a Buddhist, there is no death, just one continuous line of karma and then on into another life of karma. Your goal as Buddhist, is to extinguish hunger and desire. And every Buddhist must follow the Noble Eightfold Path: holding “the right view, the right intention, the right speech, the right actions, the right livelihood, the right effort, the right mindfulness, and the right concentration,” all good works. [Found on <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/works-salvation-delusion> by T. A/ McMahon June 1, 2010].

Even Catholicism teaches that you must do good works in order to be saved. Quote “Salvation is a process with many steps: Actual Grace, Faith, Good Works, baptism, participation in the Sacraments of Penance, Indulgences, and Keeping the Commandments.” [Found on <https://carm.org/catholicsalvation-attain> “Attaining Salvation in Roman Catholicism” by Matt Slick]. And, you must enter Purgatory before getting into Heaven.

Then, you've to the Christian cults. They all preach salvation by good works. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, have four requirements. One, be knowledgeable about the Father. Two, obey God's laws. Three, be associated with the

Jehovah's Witnesses. And four, be faithful in spreading the kingdom news. And this is what they say on eternal life.

“Accepting the message of salvation and devoting ourselves to God through Christ and being baptized in water is only the beginning of our exercise of faith. It is only the beginning of our obedience to God. It sets us on the way to everlasting life, but it does not mean our final salvation.” (This Means Everlasting Life, p. 181).

And one more, some in the Christian Church teach that you are saved because you're baptized. But folks, if baptism is necessary for salvation, then you've also missed salvation by faith alone. You are also operating according to works. Do you remember the thief who died on his cross next to Jesus? He entered Paradise without baptism.

So, the Jews aren't alone in thinking that Heaven is achieved by your best efforts.

Now, the reason I say all this is because Paul's own people, the Jews, is this, Romans 9:31 *“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? [Why?] Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”*

Are you saved by grace through faith? In other words, do you have eternal life?

The difference between the Jews and Gentiles in regards to eternal life and being righteous in God's eyes is right here in these few verses. The Gentiles, many, many of them, have exercised faith in the Person and work of the Jewish Messiah. But, although many, many Jews have trusted in Jesus as their Messiah, most today have carried on the same system of thought for generations; the system that says “I can create my own righteousness by my good works.” And what is Paul's response. “You have not found righteousness before God.” The only way to attain righteousness is by faith, apart from good works.

Now, you all, likely, know Ephesians 2:8, which says this. Ephesians 2:8 *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

“For by grace are ye saved through faith.” No one can be saved by his works. No one can be saved by being baptized. No one has eternal life if you didn't receive it as a free gift from God.

Suppose I said “the lights in this room shine by electricity and through the wire. Or, I would say the water from the faucet comes by the reservoir in the water department through the pipes.” We're saved by grace through the channel of faith. The channel is not works but faith. It is through faith and it has nothing to do with works.” [Watchman Nee “Salvation Not Being Faith with Good Works”]. So, don't add works to the means of obtaining salvation.

Here's Paul again from Romans. Romans 11:6 *“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”*

The moment we believe, the moment we trust in Someone Else's work, the work of Jesus on the Cross, God places the gift of righteousness into our hearts. It's a free gift of free righteousness. And it's a new life, eternal life. By trusting in Jesus, we are born again.

First, then, depending upon good works is the most-commonly chosen path to eternal life while God's way is by grace through faith; faith in one Person, faith in His Son.

Second, what or Who is Jesus to those who are trusting in their good works? Look again with me at Romans 9:33.

Romans 9:33 *“as it is written (in Isaiah 8:14), Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”*

You see, there are only two things anyone can do with Jesus. You either trust Him or you trust someone or something else. Can you remember the last time you tripped over a rock? That's the picture of what it looks like when people hear about Jesus Christ, learn about Jesus Christ, hear what He says, what Christians have said about Him; and then reject Him. To continue to rely on yourself and your good works is your only other alternative.

Jesus is the exact same rock Christians believe on. Yet, the Jews have stumbled over Him for centuries. He's a stumbling block to everybody who rejects Him and depend upon their good works. A stumbling block is simply a stone in your pathway.

So, to the Jews, Jesus is an offense; a Rock of Offence. To the Believers, both Jews and Gentiles, Jesus is the Living Rock, the Foundation for their lives.

If you are an unbelieving Jew, Jesus is a Rock of Offence. Still today many are so offended if you bring up the name of Jesus. One Jewish lady told me a while back how offended she was with a bumper sticker that goes says "My Boss is a Jewish Carpenter." He's still today a Stumbling block to many.

But, consider just Who Jesus is. "He was a Jew; born into a Jewish home; brought up according to strict, Jewish traditions. Throughout entire his life, Jesus lived among Jews and his followers were Jews.

And folks, no other Jew in history comes close to Jesus in his influence. Jesus, the Jew, continues to affect the lives of millions of people. Jesus is the Lord Christ, God Incarnate, the very Son of God the Father. And Jesus was such a Perfect Jew that no one yet can compare to His Jewish life. And He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah and fulfill some three hundred predictions for the Old Testament. And for Jesus to claim to be the Messiah, it's still today an extreme

offence. You see, for Jesus to say He's Messiah, the Jews say He was committing blasphemy.

Then, add to that that many Jews have become Believers in Yeshua. And many of them observe the teachings of Moses and follow what Moses taught. They count themselves as Jewish Christians. So, yes Jesus is a huge offense to the Jews.

Born a Jew, lived a Jewish life, and died a Jew. And for that the Jews throughout the centuries are offended at Him. They still are stumbling over Him. [Adapted from "Jesus, the Jew" by Edward Kessler and found on <http://www.bbc.co.uk>].

He came unto His own and His own received Him not. And, because they rejected Him, the Bible refers to Jesus as the Stumbling stone and the Rock of Offence.

There are only two responses to Jesus. Either receive the free gift of eternal life or reject Jesus and reject eternal life. He becomes either a Solid Rock for you or He becomes a Stumbling Stone and a Rock of Offence.

Folks, there are people all over the world who are hearing the message of Life that salvation is found in no one except the LORD Jesus. And there are more opportunities to be saved here in America than in any place in the entire world. But, because of our materialism and our religiousness, and because of our pride, multitudes of Americans will likely go to Hell.

And, of all the ones who have been given the opportunity to receive Christ, none have rejected Christ more than the religious community.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the LIFE, the Eternal Life. And every day people around the world are deciding for or against Jesus. Some will choose to depend upon Him; some will not. And those who depend upon Him are not ashamed of Him.

So, do you have eternal life? Are you depending upon Jesus Christ alone for eternal life? And are you depending upon Him as your LORD and Savior? Or, is He an Offence to you and a Stumbling stone? There are only two choices. And it's up to you to reject Him or to believe on Him.

Why not choose Him today? Repent, change your mind and trust in Jesus Christ, the Only Way to experience Eternal Life.

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 670 "Make Me A Blessing"