**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**The Answer to Life's Greatest Question, Part 1**
Scripture: Luke 10:25
Code: 42-141

Our text this morning, Luke chapter 10 verses 25 through 29. We have a little motto at Grace To You, "Unleashing God's truth one verse at a time," and that's what we do here as we open the Word of God every Lord's day. And we are working our way through this marvelous gospel of Luke, Luke's record of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. We find ourselves now in chapter 10 and a section beginning in verse 25. And I will read down through verse 29. I won't be able to cover this entire section, but...this morning, but I will endeavor to introduce it and get a little bit of a start and we'll endeavor to complete it next Lord's day. And I don't want to hurry through it. It's just too critical. You'll note its importance even as we read it.

Starting in Luke 10 verse 25, "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How does it read to you?' And he answered and said, '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 neighbor as yourself.' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.' But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

Of all the questions that could ever be asked, of all the questions that could ever be answered, none is more important than this one. What shall I do to inherit eternal life? That is the most important question that can be asked and answered. And the reason is that every human soul is immortal. No soul, no inner person in any human being ever goes out of existence. Every human being ever born lives forever. Our bodies die, our souls go on eternally. We are created immortal. Annihilation is a lie. Soul sleep is a lie. Reincarnation is a lie. Evolution is a lie. Every person who has ever lived will be the person they are forever.

The only question is, where and under what condition will you spend your forever? That is obviously the most compelling question that can ever be asked. And compared to the brief time in which we live in this world, compelling beyond any other consideration. Every one of us is eternal. You will go on as you forever. James says that life in this world is a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away. It's like steam from a boiling kettle, there it is and then it's gone. Life in this world is an infinitesimal amount of time compared with eternity. You will live forever. You will never go out of

existence. And you will spend that forever in one of two places, heaven or hell, and those are the only two places. There is no other place. There is no purgatory. There is no waiting place. There is no limbo. There is heaven, and there is hell and that is all and you will be in one of those two places through all eternity. And you will be conscious that you are there with the full heightening of all your rational faculties running at their maximum. And there will be no dulling of your sensibilities and sensitivities and understanding and comprehension as if to somehow mitigate the joys of heaven or ameliorate the pains of hell.

This is the question of all questions and it is a basic question. I confess it is basic. But it is essential to deal with this question. We are at the basics right now. We're dealing with Jesus and the gospel which He preached, which is the foundation of everything, the foundation of the rest of the New Testament and of all the work of the church that has gone on since it was written. We make no apology for then embracing this question and then dealing with it.

Now just to put you in the flow of what's going on in the life of Christ at this time, it's less than a year now, it's just a matter of months before He will be executed on a cross and then rise from the dead and then forty days later ascend into heaven and send the Holy Spirit and the church age begins. He's moving now in the last year of His life, the last year of His brief, three-year ministry. And in this particular time He is blanketing...has already blanketed Galilee with the message of the gospel. He's now in these final months blanketing Judea's village and town, here and there, proclaiming this wonderful message of eternal life. So we are in the heart of the teaching ministry of Jesus.

He is calling people to be disciples of His, true disciples, not just curious but committed. He has already said that if you want to come after Me, in the true sense, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me, back in chapter 9 verse 23. That is to say, deny yourself, your own ambition, your own desires, your own will and submit everything to Me. Refuse to associate with the person that you have been up to now. Come after Me. Declare that I am Lord of your life. Take up a cross, even if I ask you to die, be willing to die. And under all conditions, submit in obedience to My will and My Word. And that is the hard call but the true call to true discipleship.

In the midst of the teaching about being a true disciple, the Lord has pulled together seventy of His true disciples and dispatched them out two by two to spread this message of true discipleship, to spread the gospel of salvation through faith in the Messiah who has arrived. The seventy have gone out. They've had some success and so we're in the middle of the evangelistic enterprise of Jesus and the twelve apostles and the seventy who were also sent.

In the midst of this proclamation of...of the gospel, inviting people to become true followers of Christ, inviting them to self-denial, cross-bearing and obedience, inviting them to enter the kingdom, inviting them to receive the forgiveness of sin, inviting them to eternal life, we come in this text to a very personal conversation. Though it happened in a public environment, it was a personal conversation. This is evangelism one-on-one. We have heard Jesus preach in synagogues and outdoors. The apostles have gone out two-by-two and preached in towns and villages of Galilee. The seventy have gone into all the towns and villages where Jesus would come to visit, preparing the way by preaching the gospel publicly there. Jesus has been preaching most of what we've been going through with some exceptions, has been pubic ministry to groups of people. But here we come to a one-on-one encounter between Jesus and a lawyer who asked Him this question. And the question is: What do I do to inherit eternal life? This is the most compelling question.

Now, two years plus into the ministry of Jesus, He has already covered Galilee, a year and a half in Galilee preaching, sending the twelve. He has already spent the first year of His ministry in Judea so the knowledge of Him has spread around. Now He's back there for the final months before His crucifixion and He's preaching again and being added in that by the apostles and the seventy.

But with all of that preaching activity and literally banishing illness, as it were, from the land of Israel by His miracle power, and doing miracle after miracle, day after day, to prove that He in fact is the divine Son of God, with all of that the number of true disciples, those who have genuinely believed and embraced the gospel is very, very small. We know there are the twelve. One of them is a false disciple. We know there are the seventy whose names are recorded in heaven, verse 20 tells us that. So you have at least eighty-one true believers and there must have been some others who weren't commissioned among the twelve or the seventy. But it's not a huge crowd by any means. And later on, when Jesus after His resurrection appears in Galilee to the gathered believers, there are only 500 of them there. And when the Holy Spirit falls in the upper room in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus, there are only 120 gathered there. So by head count, 6-700, maybe a few hundred more, but after all this ministry, all this demonstration of divine power, that's a... That's a small remnant. It certainly fulfills what our Lord said when He said, "The gate is narrow and few there be that find it." And He was preaching forgiveness of sin. He was preaching the kingdom of God. He was preaching blessing. They didn't accept the message because they wouldn't accept the diagnosis that in spite of what they thought of themselves, they were wretched sinners, they were religious hypocrites, and they were on their way to destruction. They didn't like the diagnosis so they rejected the cure.

Here we meet one who was following in the crowd. He is identified as a lawyer. We'll find out more about him next week. But this takes, this preaching ministry of Jesus, the apostles and the seventy, and takes it right down to a one-to-one conversation and we learn from this some profound and helpful lessons about doing evangelism. Jesus is our model. Now remember, the literate, the elite, the religious leaders, the educated, the prominent, the powerful, the influential had rejected Jesus. They are the wise and intelligent of verse 21 of whom Jesus said that the Father had hidden these things. And those that have believed and are following Jesus are babes. They are the nothings and the nobodies. They are the fishermen and those who worked with their hands, those who were the unknown. Not one of them was a Pharisee, not one a Sadducee, not one a scribe, not one a rabbi, not one a priest, not one with any position of prominence, other than Matthew, who was a tax collector and thus possessed a position which made him the most hated of all people by the Jews. They are the riff-raff. And the others who seemed to be tagging along after Jesus are the publicans and sinners and harlots. But they are the babes. That is they considered themselves as nothing, as having no rank and no achievement. And in their desperation and a proper assessment of their condition, they embraced the gospel which the self-righteous and the proud rejected.

Here we meet one who is among the elite. Here we meet one who belongs to the religious establishment. And this encounter gives us insight into how you evangelize a person one to one. Now this person, this lawyer, unnamed, has a privilege that is beyond estimation. He has the opportunity to have a conversation about eternal life with the One who is eternal life Himself. His privilege cannot be overstated. And the result makes the story all the more tragic. Here he is face-to-face with the eternal life, asking the right question and going away to face eternal death. It's a horrific loss of opportunity. But in the process we learn what is necessary in doing effective, personal evangelism the way Jesus did it.

There are four things required and I'm going to work my way through these with you. Number one, if you're going to have an impact on somebody in regard to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the matters of eternal life, they have to have a recognition of eternal life. The key word is recognition. They have to recognize that they're going to have to live forever.

Secondly, they have to have a motivation toward eternal life. Once recognizing that life is eternal, they need to be motivated toward that eternal life which God offers through His Son. Recognition of eternal life, motivation for eternal life, and then a third point we're going to talk about is the complexion of eternal life. We need to understand the nature of that eternal life. We use the word complexion to talk about somebody's face. That is probably an appropriate way to refer to complexion. Complexion comes from complex which means a structure or an order. And that's why, you know, why ladies use makeup, to bring order and structure to what is otherwise disorderly. So,

but we don't need to go there, that's not...that's not helpful. So it's an application of that concept. But complex means the structure of something, the order of something. And I want to talk to you as Jesus talked to that man about the nature of, or the essence of, or the order of eternal life.

We move from the recognition that it exists, to the motivation to desire it, to the complexion, or the definition of it, and finally the acquisition of eternal life. How does one then appropriate that? Understanding it exists, being motivated to receive it, understanding its nature, how does one then receive that eternal life? That is the flow of the conversation. It is a very, very critical, critical text.

Now, just having read that text and the question: Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? If you're a Bible student at all — if you've read the gospels and, of course, most of you have — that sounds like a very familiar question, doesn't it? Well it is a familiar question because that question appears a number of times in the gospels. In fact, it appears in every gospel. But I want you to know that this particular encounter with this man is not a parallel to any of those others. This is a unique event.

In Matthew 19 it wasn't a lawyer, it was a rich young ruler and the setting was very different though the question was the same. And as we'll note, the one in John 6 was a group of people and not an individual. So this stands alone and we can't really compare this with the other ones because they're different. But what it tells us is that the question about eternal life was on the minds of the people. In different times, in different locations and different encounters from different people, the question kept coming up. And it comes up because of the first point I want you to understand. This is what we have to understand. They had a recognition of eternal life. They recognized eternal life. And by that I don't mean they only recognized that they would live forever, but they recognized that there was an eternal life, not in the *bios* sense, not eternally living, but eternal life in the *z* sense, that is eternal well-being, eternal blessing, really living. They recognized that God had promised an eternal kingdom, that God had promised a Kingdom of blessing, a domain of bliss and joy and peace and fulfillment and satisfaction and hope. They believed in that. That was part of the very fabric of Judaistic philosophy and theology. This conversation would never have occurred if the question hadn't been asked.

The question wouldn't have been asked if the man didn't believe in eternal life. He wouldn't need to know how to inherit it if he didn't already know that it existed. He knew he would live forever and he knew that it was possible in living forever to live with God in His kingdom. The whole incident is predicated on his understanding of immortality. Of course, evolution, materialism, humanism and atheism has cut man off from that universal conviction that has always existed in humanity until our modern times. I don't care where you go in the world throughout history to any culture no matter how primitive they might be you find belief in immortality. But now, living in this post-humanistic, post-materialistic, post-evolutionary world, people no longer need to believe in immortality. And so in our

evangelism, we can't presume that people understand that they will live forever.

But historically and I think even still today in spite of all of the philosophies that have been pounded into the heads of our society, most people believe and have believed in the immortality of the soul. People still try to talk to their dead relatives, don't they, through hypnosis and seances and whatever. People believe, and you hear it all the time, that somewhere up there the people that have died are looking down and watching them, and there's just this reality that exists in the human heart. God has set eternity in the human heart. And philosophically you might talk yourself out of it, but there's this nagging sense that it's there. Man feels the pull of eternity in his heart like a little blind boy flying a kite feels the tug of the wind against his hand as it pulls the string though he can't see it. Man feels the pull of eternity. The Creator has put that longing in his heart. That's why in Egyptian society, for example, when they buried the Pharaohs in the pyramids they put a solar boat with them so that they would sail across the river into the next world. And when the Greeks buried somebody in the Greek culture, they put a silver coin in their mouth when they put them into the ground so they could pay their fare across the mystic river into eternity. And in American history when the American Indians buried their warriors and their braves on the plains of our own nation, they buried their ponies with them so they could have something to ride through the happy hunting ground. I mean, that's just everywhere across the face of the earth throughout history. God has set eternity in the heart.

But that's not why this lawyer believed in that and that's not why I believe in immortality. I feel the pull of immortality. That's a normal, human sense that God has built into us. But the fact of immortality is on the pages of the revealed Word of God, the Bible. The scribe knew his Old Testament. And so he knew he would live forever. The Old Testament taught that. And it taught that there was an eternal place of bliss and blessing in the kingdom of God and there was another place of terror and fear and darkness and punishment. Eternal life is referred to many times in the Old Testament.

Let me just show you a few because they're so important. In the 16th Psalm, listen to the confidence of the inspired David as he writes. Verse 8, Psalm 16: "I have set the Lord continually before me. Because He's at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices." David says I rejoice. I have joy. Here's why. "My flesh also will dwell securely for Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol or the grave, neither wilt Thou allow Thy holy one to undergo decay. Thou wilt make known to me the path of life. In Thy presence is fullness of joy. In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever." David said, I can take anything in life. I can go through anything that comes my way. I can bless the Lord. I have set the Lord before me. I will not be shaken. My heart is glad. My mouth rejoices. I live in security. Why? Because I'm not going to end up in a grave, I'm not going to corrupt in that tomb or that grave, I'm going through that grave, out the other side, down the path of life into Your presence where there's fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. This is the hope that

is clearly given to the Old Testament believer, which, of course, later is applied in Peter's great sermon to Christ as well.

In Psalm 21 verse 4, "He asked life of Thee, Thou didst giveth to him, length of days forever and ever. His glory is great through Thy salvation." Through God's salvation He provides life that goes on forever. Now this is repeated in many, many places. Job knew that if he died, yet in his flesh he would still see God whom he would see for himself and no one else. David knew that when he died he would awake in God's likeness and be fully satisfied. When David's little son died he said, "He cannot come to me but I will go to him." He knew there would be a reunion with his little son that died and entered the presence of the Lord.

In Psalm 133:3 it says, "The Lord commanded the blessing." What was it? "Life forever. Life forever." And so the Jews had the anticipation of immortality, that they would live forever and that they could live forever in the bliss and the joy and the pleasure of the presence of God. The prophets followed up on this same great truth. In Daniel, for example, chapter 2 and verse 44, Daniel writes, "In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed and that kingdom will not be left for another people, it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms but it will itself endure forever."

And Daniel was looking, as the other prophets were, to a coming kingdom. And once that kingdom started, once God inaugurated that kingdom on earth, it would never end. Its earthly component would end after a thousand years, the book of Revelation tells us, but immediately it would transition into the new heaven and the new earth, the eternal kingdom. So once God established His kingdom, it was forever. The promise then was that one could live in that forever kingdom with all its pleasures and all its joys and all its satisfactions in God's glorious presence.

In Daniel 7, Daniel's vision, he looked in the night visions, he says, and saw one like a Son of Man. He saw Christ coming and came up to the Ancient of Days, up to God Himself, and was presented before Him and to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. And here we learn that this kingdom in the presence of God, where there's joy and pleasure forever is going to be for all peoples and all nations, every language. It says His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away. His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. And then dropping down to verse 18 of Daniel 7: "The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever," that is for all ages to come.

And then at the end of Daniel, one more passage. This is a great text. Daniel 12:2, "When the Lord comes," verse 2 says, Daniel 12, "many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake," looking at the future resurrection, "these to everlasting life," these to eternal life, "others to disgrace and everlasting hatred." Hatred that lasts forever. Punishment that lasts forever. Contempt that lasts forever. Disgrace that lasts forever. They knew. They knew there were two worlds in which the immortal soul of every individual would live, either the world of the presence of God, or the world apart from His presence.

When Gabriel, the angel, came as we saw back in Luke chapter 1, and announced to Mary the coming of Jesus Christ, he said in verse 32, "He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom will have no end." That angel was reiterating what Mary knew, what she had been taught, that God was going to send a Son, the Son of Man, as Daniel 7 pointed it out, and that He would come and establish an eternal kingdom. This was a common conviction of the Jews: that they would live forever and they could live forever in God's presence. And in God's presence there would be satisfaction, and in God's presence there would be fullness of joy, and in God's presence there would be pleasures forever. And that's why the question kept coming up. The rich young ruler, what do I do to inherit eternal life? The lawyer, what do I do to inherit eternal life? And in John chapter 6 the whole multitude of people that are in the presence of Jesus are confronted with this same issue. Verse 27 of John 6 Jesus says, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life. You're far too concerned with earthly things, far too concerned with temporal things. You need to be concerned about eternal life which the Son of man shall give you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal. I'm offering you eternal life and you're chasing Me around for breakfast cause I fed you last night. Remember the loaves and the fish. And so they said, "What shall we do that we might work such works to get eternal life?"

It seems like everybody was asking that question. Rabbi Ben Eliezer was one of the rabbis of Israel whose writings we have and in one of his writings he says that there was a conversation that started this way. "Rabbi, teach us the ways of life so that by them we may attain to the life of the future world." They all believed in a future world. And they wanted the life in the presence of God, not the alternative, not the everlasting disgrace and contempt and hatred. They wanted joy, not sadness. They wanted reward, not punishment. They knew about the next life. They knew. This lawyer knew that Enoch had walked right into the next life; that Elijah had gone right into the next life in a chariot of fire. They knew that Moses had just disappeared into the next life and never has his body been found. They knew that Job anticipated the next life. They knew that David looked forward to it, and so on and so on.

Eternal life, not chronological life or some kind of biological life, but life in the fullest sense, really living in the presence of God; they knew it was available and it meant to go into God's eternal kingdom of bliss and blessing and pleasure forever.

You say, "Well why did they ask the question? I mean, weren't they pretty confident that they were going to be there anyway?" Well, you know, kind of on paper, or on parchment if you will, that the system said that...that you know, you can sort of count on your Judaism to get you there. I mean, if you're a Jew, hey, you know, we're the children of Abraham. Certainly we're going to be there. And if you were circumcised the eighth day and if you kept the law... Remember Paul's little list there in Philippians 3. If you kept the law and the ceremonies and you did the traditions and all of that, and were externally, at least, observant of the law. I mean, weren't they pretty convinced that everything was going to be OK, that they were Jews and they belonged to the chosen people and they had gone through the circumcision and they made the sacrifices and the blood of the animal on the Day of Atonement covered their sins and the other sacrifices did as well, and wasn't, after all, the promise of God to them? And weren't they the people of God? I mean, wasn't everything really OK?

And again I say, on parchment, yeah it was OK. But it didn't deal with their conscience. It was superficial. It was hypocritical. It was external. It didn't guarantee them the kingdom of God at all, as we know. And Paul in Philippians 3 said, "I looked at it all and I reevaluated all the stuff I thought would get me in the kingdom of God and realized it was all manure." Very dramatic statement. It not only didn't get me there, it not only wasn't enough; it was sending me the other direction. They knew that inside. They weren't ready to admit on the outside that they weren't qualified, but I really believe there's a nagging question that keeps coming up and it comes up because the heart is utterly discontent. If they were whited sepulchers full of dead men's bones, then they lived with that reality all the time. Paul said, "No man knows the man but the spirit of that man." They knew the reality of the condition of their hearts. They had painted themselves white on the surface. But that nagging question was there because they knew they weren't right with God, because they knew they weren't in control of their lives. They knew they couldn't live righteously on the inside. There was the fear that they were going to miss that eternal life. And the fact that they came and asked the question points up how this question existed and it was everywhere.

They believed in eternal life. They wanted to be there. And when Jesus started preaching, what did He preach about? "For God so loves the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life," everlasting life. His message was about eternal life all through the preaching of Jesus. I...I'm amazed how many, many times He talked about eternal life. At least fifty times eternal life is referred to in the New Testament. He said in Mark 10:29, "Truly I

say to you, there's no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother or father or children or farms for My sake and the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive 100 times as much now in the present age houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms." What that means is if you gave up all that to embrace Christ, what you got in exchange was the body of Christ. You got all of us. Now we're your family and we provide all that. But, He said, along with persecution. Just throw that in. And then He adds, "And in the age to come," eternal life. It's really about eternal life. The main message of the gospel is eternal life. It's not isolated, as I said, it's just everywhere and when you read the New Testament through the gospels again, just look for it. John 4:36, "Already he who reaps is receiving wages and his gathering fruit for life eternal." John 5:39, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life." The Jews looked at the Scripture and they searched. Why? They wanted to find the way to eternal life. That's what they were looking for.

You know, they were a lot further ahead of many evangelicals today, at least on the surface. At least they knew that the issue was eternal life, not a better life here. Jesus said in John 6:54, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I'll raise him up on the last day." Verse 68, I love this, "Will you go away?" Jesus says. Everybody's gone. The disciples walked no more with Him. Will you go away? Remember Peter's answer, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of (what?) eternal life." Everybody was into eternal life. It was all about eternal life. It was the question most on the hearts of those people. Everybody's going to live forever. Where? And if God has a kingdom and I can be there to live with Him forever, how do I inherit that kingdom? Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, I know them, they follow Me and I give them eternal life and they shall never perish and no one shall ever be able to take them out of My hand." It's about eternal life. John 12:25, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it. He who hates his life in this world shall keep it to eternal life." You lose your life here, you deny yourself, you crucify yourself, you set yourself aside, and you live forever. That's where the discussion of eternal life links with Luke 9:23. "If any man will come after Me to receive eternal life, he has to deny himself." If you lose your life, you gain it. If you keep your life, you lose it.

It just goes on like this. It's all through the gospel record. John 17:2, "Even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life, and this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." If you want eternal life, you have to know God; you have to know God through Christ. You come in to the book of Acts and the apostles and the preachers go out and their message is the same thing. It's the message of eternal life. It's...There's nothing but the message of eternal life to preach. Acts 13:48, "When the Gentiles heard this they started rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord and as many as been appointed to eternal life believed and the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region."

Well I could go on. I could read from Romans 2:7; Romans 5:21; Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death and the gift of God is eternal life." First Timothy 1:16, "For this reason I found mercy in order that in me as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Titus 1:2, "In the hope of eternal life." That's why Christ came. That's why Paul preached the gospel. Five, six times in 1 John it talks about eternal life. Jude 21 talks about everlasting life. It's everywhere. And there are other descriptives and phases. This in the Greek is *z ainios*, eternal life, life that never ends.

And so, I go back to where I started. You're going to live forever. Everybody is. Bodies die, people don't, and you will live forever as you. Annihilation again is a lie, soul sleep is a lie, reincarnation is a lie, evolution is a lie, you're not evolving into somebody else and you're not cycling back as somebody else, you're you and you'll be you forever somewhere and you have only two places as possibilities. First Timothy 4:8 Paul says, "Bodily discipline is only of little profit." You spend all your time fussing around with your physical body, it has little profit because it's a perishable commodity. "But godliness is profitable for all things." Why? Because it holds promise not only for the present life but for the life to come. If you're going to work on something, work on the part of you that lasts forever. See, this society in which we live, maniacal about the perishing flesh and indifferent to the eternal soul.

All evangelism, beloved, begins here. It is not about this life. It is not about prosperity in this life. It is not about health in this life. It is not about happiness in this life. It is not about healing in this life. It is not about success. It is not about money. It is not about possessions. It is not about freedom from trouble. That's junk-bond evangelism. It's not about that. That bilks people out of their souls on false premises. Run from people who sell that; they're false teachers. And so, if you're going to do some evangelism, you've got to move people from “Jesus is going to fix me here,” to “Jesus is going to deliver me in the life to come.” Until the sinner really understands that, evangelism can't even start.

So the enemy loves to propagate the lie that there is no eternal destiny. You die and you just become protoplasm that turns into manure and that's it. You fertilize the soil you're in and that's the end. So live it up while you can. This is the dominant lie in our society propagated by evolutionists and humanists and materialists and atheists who refuse to believe in a Creator because if they did, He would be the supreme Judge, and if He was the supreme Judge they're in serious trouble. You will live forever: either in the presence of God or as 2 Thessalonians 1 says, "away from His presence." And you will be conscious and all of your faculties heighten to their maximum capability so that you will feel all the pain of hell and all the joys of heaven.

And again, this is very unpopular in evangelism today because talking about hell is unpopular. It's sort of uncouth. And talking about heaven is unpopular because everybody would rather stay here. We don't talk about that. We just want to talk about how things could be better in this life, how Jesus can be the fixer of this life. You... You remember how often Jesus talked about hell, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, outer darkness where the fires never quench, the worm never dies, graphic language, Matthew 8:12; Matthew 22:13; Matthew 24:51; 25:30; etc. If you're going to do any evangelism that's legitimate, you have to clarify the reality of eternal destiny. This is the first task of the evangelist. This is the first task of evangelism. Nobody is going to come to ask the question, “What do I do to inherit eternal life?” if eternal life isn't a compelling issue. How do we get there? We've got to stop talking about the issues in this life and motivate people for the life to come.

I talked to somebody yesterday for a long conversation. He told me of just a horrendous experience, his personal experience in his life, all kinds of pain, suffering, no way out, bad relationship. He said, "What do I do?"

I said, "Hope in heaven." I said, "I don't think you can fix it. Put it aside, it's part of this world. And remember that Jesus said, 'In this world you shall have trouble, but I've overcome the world” and some day you're going to enter into that triumph. Consider it for what it is, it's the world. It's the world.

That's where you have to go in this matter of evangelism. Let me just make it... I'll try to make it as practical as I can. When you evangelize someone typically in this environment, when the church evangelizes in this environment, the whole idea is to work with felt needs, right? Let's find out what their addictions are. Let's find out what their little quirks are, their disappointments are. What their challenges in life are, what their disappointments are, what they feel isn't the way they would exactly like it to be in their life. You know, maybe they don't look like they think they should look and maybe they're heavier than they think they should be. You know, maybe they've got a bad smoking habit, drinking habit, an addiction, blah, blah, blah, on and on. Let's find out what their little deal is and we'll slide in there and we'll say, "Jesus is the fixer of your little deal, your little life issue. He's the...Jesus is the helper of the dysfunctional." That's the new approach to evangelism. You can read books that say, "If I can find, you know, if you can find people's felt needs, you can lead anybody to Christ."

The driving motivation for salvation has nothing to do with this life, nothing. There is no promise in the gospel that you're going to have a trouble-free life. There's no promise in the gospel that you're going to have a pain-free life and that you're going to have a happy, successful life. The message of the gospel takes care of what happens in the next life. And while you're here, you endure in hope. And

that's what I told the person I talked to, I said, "This is where hope kicks in."

You may be successful in this life. You may be wealthy in this life. You may be healthy in this life. You may be content in this life. You may have a great marriage, a great partner, good kids, nice home, good career, and so do many who have no knowledge of Christ at all. And you may, on the other hand, be miserable in this life, married to a jerk, married to somebody who is unfaithful, with lousy kids who just do nothing but drive you crazy. You may get cancer and fight it for fifteen years. You may always wish to be something and do something and never do it. Some of you may wish to get married and wind up single your whole life, much to your dismay. And so do many other Christians. You never measure the issues of salvation by what's going on in this life. It's about the life to come. In this world you're going to have tribulation. But what's going to give you the upper hand in your suffering is the hope of the life to come, and that produces present joy.

You know, we would all do well to get shipped off to the Third World. We'd be better off to be slaves in the gulag, or orphans in the Third World than to be in this affluent society and try to have any desire for the life to come. We've got to stop offering a gospel that intends to help people buy a bigger SUV. That is absolutely absurd...or any other temporal thing. We're talking about forever here, not now.

You say, "Well, are you saying that Jesus doesn't do anything now?" Sure He does. He gives you the grace and the peace and the joy to endure now with all of its disappointments, and to turn some of its sorrows into joy because trials do perfect us. Why? They drive us to Him. They make us love Him more, hope for heaven more, and that makes us a more healthy Christian. We've got to deal with people on the basis of eternal issues. And I don't see that happening in evangelism.

So that's point number one, and it's not even in the text, it's implied. Now you've got to be some kind of clever preacher to get that out of there, right? But isn't that right? Isn't that implied? It's got...I mean, if you ask the question about eternal life, the implication is he knew about eternal life. Now you know about it and you go from the recognition of eternal life to the motivation for eternal life. And we have to say to the person, "OK, now that you know the Bible teaches eternal life, you're going to live forever, are you motivated by that?" This young man was. We assume young man, this lawyer. He said, "How do I get it?" And we're going to, next week, look at the motivation and then the complexion of eternal life which is to find, and then the acquisition or appropriation of eternal life.

Father, again this Word is so simple and foundational, it's just the same simple truth that is at the heart of all gospel preaching and has been for all time. There is death and there is afterlife and it's

either in Your presence or out of it. Eternal life is a reality. And help us as we evangelize as we proclaim the gospel to draw people not to the things of this world because You don't give us any guarantees in this world except that we might have to give up everything and what we're going to get is the wonderful fellowship of believers, along with persecution. But You've got it all stored up for us beyond our wildest imaginations in the life to come to help us to take this vapor for what it is, a little steam off a boiling kettle, here and gone, and set our hearts on eternity, set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. And as we evangelize, may it be that we talk about what is eternal, not what is temporal, what lasts forever, because we know we will live forever and we can endure anything in this life. Hope produces this joyous endurance, this triumphant endurance, this overcoming endurance. Use us mightily in this proclamation. May we be faithful to follow the lead of our Savior and deal with the subject that matters most. We pray in His name. Amen.

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