

## Sermon – 27/11/2011 am

### Question of Eternal Life

Study Text: Luke 10:25-28

Children can ask very profound questions. A mother was saying how her little girl asked ‘Mummy, what happens after we die?’ The mother said she was not yet ready for such a question. ‘Well darling, some believe we come back as an animal and others think we go to live in the stars, but I really don’t know’. How tragic! All that mother had to do was open the Bible and read to this little girl: ‘it is appointed for men to die once and after that the judgment (Hebrews 9:28). She could go on to read to that little girl about how Jesus died to save us from that judgment.

People came to Jesus with their questions. They asked profound questions. The Roman governor asked him ‘what is truth’? Trying asking a TV panel that question! A lawyer asked Jesus about eternal life. How many parents or teachers could answer this question?

#### 1. Lawyer’s Question

In this passage we find a Jewish lawyer asking Jesus a profound question, a question about life and death. Jewish lawyers spent a lot of time discussing the law and its finer points. They wanted to make sure they were keeping the law because they thought it was a matter of life and death. The question was valid, although it was not asked sincerely.

Jesus was moving towards the holy city of Jerusalem. The closer he got the more he would encounter lawyers and priests. This man must have been in a crowd that was listening to Jesus teach because *‘he stood up and tested him (Jesus)’* (10:25).

In what way did he test Jesus with this question? It was not really a trick question meant to trap him. It was probably one the lawyers often discussed and disputed. But the lawyer did not for a moment think that Jesus could answer the question. Such a clever question would shut this teacher up he thought. It was a question that would silence Jesus and make the lawyer look good.

There is a fundamentally false premise in this question. What is it? Eternal life is real. Jesus often spoke about eternal life. He said that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:15). The false premise is ‘what shall I do’? Like so many today, this man was thinking of things he should do or not do in order to get eternal life. He did not understand that he could never keep the holy law of God because his heart was intrinsically wicked.

If we flick over the pages we find a rich young ruler asking Jesus the very same question (18:18). Most people are asking this question. Why? Because our Maker has put eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Despite all that people say and teach about us just being another type of ape or monkey, in their hearts they are fearful of death. ‘What happens when we die?’ is what the child asks and what the old person asks. The animal does not ask this question!

‘There is probably no God, so stop worrying’ read the banner put on London buses by the atheists. ‘Who is worrying’ asks the Christian apologist, John Lennox. Are you worrying? It is not born again Christians who are worrying. Atheists are worrying because, as their banner admits, they cannot be sure. There is probably no God. There is the possibility, and if there is a God their perceptions about life and death will be shattered.

## 2. Lord's Question

Do you know the answer to the lawyer's question? A born again Christian will know. Jesus said to a Pharisee called Nicodemus 'you must be born again' (John 3:3). He said that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Jesus could have answered the lawyer in the same way but he chose not to. Unlike Nicodemus the lawyer did not admit that Jesus was a teacher come from God (John 3:2). Instead Jesus asked the lawyer a return question, a question about the law.

*'What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?'* (10:26). When Jesus was tempted by Satan he relied upon what was written in the Scriptures. Jesus referred this expert in the law to what was written in the law. Jesus knew he was not ready to listen to a direct answer. With wisdom from above Jesus led him to think about what he read. How do you read it?

It is important for us to understand how a person is thinking when we bring the gospel to them. We try to meet them where they are at. In the very first place of course we must understand the Bible and what we believe. But we must try to enter into the mind of the person we are witnessing to and make this point of contact so that they will listen.

We must know our Bible because there are those who quickly come up with criticisms of the Bible, usually well-worn criticisms. You may encounter atheists like Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens. John Lennox has debated these men. While Lennox was speaking at a Sydney high school a student in the audience was texting the atheists' society for tough questions to ask him. This student later came to believe in Jesus, so Lennox told us.

Although Jesus knew he was being tested he answered the lawyer with respect. He did not launch into a tirade against him. He got this man thinking about the law. No doubt this lawyer was thrilled to be asked his expert opinion on the law and that in public. Jesus got him thinking as well as talking. But he would soon be listening carefully to what Jesus had to say.

The lawyer demonstrated a wide knowledge and understanding of Scripture. To draw passages from Deuteronomy and Leviticus as a summary of the law was remarkable – even if it was something he had been taught in school. Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 is known as the 'Shema'. Jews recite it every day. 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.'

Jesus used the same summary of the law when on another occasion he was answering a scribes question about the commandments (Matthew 22:37). The scribe said to Jesus *'well said teacher'* (Mark 12:32). This time it was Jesus who said to the lawyer *'you have answered rightly'* (10:28). So there was agreement with regard to the commandments. Jesus was not preaching abolition of the law. The question was about keeping it.

## 3. Live If Keep the Commandments

*'Do this and you will live'* said Jesus (10:28). If you 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind' and also 'love your neighbour as yourself' you will live. Notice the absolutes in these commandments. We will look at the word 'love' shortly, but the word 'all' is an absolute term. It is not love God with most of your heart; it is not love God as best you can; it is love God with all your being. You may have noticed an extra condition in what the lawyer said compared to Moses, namely 'your mind'. The meaning is still the same – all your being.

Do you love God with all your being? Outside of Christ no one has or can. *Without faith it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus, the Son of God, is the only man to have ever kept the whole law. Yet this commandment is one that people can delude themselves about. They think

that God being a loving God understands when they do not love him as they should. They forget that God is a jealous God who will not give his glory to another.

Note that the commandments are here stated in the positive. You will be familiar with the negative formulation in the Ten Commandments. Lots of people pat themselves on the back saying 'I have never killed anyone' so I have kept the law. 'I may have told the odd lie' they admit, but so has everyone else. Men can only claim to have kept the law if they lower the bar from the absolutes set by God – and that means God is no longer the holy God.

The rich young ruler told Jesus he had kept the second table of the commandments (18:21). He had not murdered anyone, or lied, or stolen anything as far as the law was concerned. Jesus did not refute his claim but said 'you still lack one thing'. Did he love God with all his heart, soul and strength? He did not even love God with his money!

Love is an absolute and we do not like absolutes. We do not even like making the commitment to love, let alone loving with all our being. We do not even know what love is, apart from Christ. This absolute love is seen only in Jesus. We only know such love from the Cross. *'This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us'* (I John 3:16). And this verse in I John continues 'we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren'.

As the lawyer told Jesus the demands of the law and heard Jesus say 'do this and you will live', he started to think about how he would be judged under this law. His focus was on the second of the two summary commandments. He was not sure if he was loving his neighbour as himself. His concern was not what it meant to love but as a legalist he wanted to define who was his neighbour.

'Jesus was not commending a new system of legalism somewhat different to the old, but was pointing to the end of all legalism' writes Morris. Let us be sure, as the apostle Paul states, that while the law is 'holy, just and good' (Romans 7:12), no one will ever be justified or receive eternal life by the works of the law. *'The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith'* (Galatians 3:24).

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