

Sermon: Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Westfield, IN—5/4/2003

Title: “The Truth About Eternal Life?”

Guest Pastor: Tim Edwards

Sermon

I need to preface today’s sermon with the warning that I will probably offend you. You see today I want to talk about a controversial topic. I am going to talk to you about “Eternal Life” and whether God plays fair. Before I begin to offend you let me explain what I mean by eternal life. Eternal life is more than just living forever. It is living forever in Heaven with God. Living in Heaven is living free from pain and suffering, it is living in joy upon joy. Now I want you all to take a moment to think about what heaven and eternal life is going to be like.... Now our Lord loves his children so much that he has prepared a place for those who are his own that it is beyond the imagination of anyone... for he has reserved that special moment of your joy unto himself... for the scriptures tells us...Corinthians 2:9: **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--**

Eternal life doesn’t sound very offensive does it? Yet I will offend you at least twice today. Why will I offend you? Because I need to tell you the truth about eternal life.

Are You Special

How many of you here are you parent’s favorite child... common lets see a show of hands.... Come on I know that there are more of you than that. I positive that many of you have thought at one time or another that you were mommy and daddy’s favorite.... Just think about your brothers and sisters.... then think about yourself ... there your starting to get the picture.... Now remember about 25 minuets ago we did confession and absolution... and it not nice to lie to the Pastor... so lets try this once again... who here thinks that they were their parent’s favorite...

Boy are you a tough bunch or what... Those of you who didn’t hold up your hands well... either your humbleness or your self-righteousness must be greater than the rest of us... As for those individuals who held up there hands... well Your just plain bold in the proclamation of your sin...(just kidding)

I would say that if the truth be known I think that each and everyone of us would have to admit at one time or another that perhaps we thought or desired to be our parents favorite...their special child... And if not you surely you must have felt that one of your siblings must have been.....

I one of seven children... 3 girls and four boys... and still today.... When I call my mother... I say hello mom it’s your favorite son.... And my mother being the wise lady that she is responds **Oh hello Richard;** ... If you would ask my mother... which one of us were her favorite.. She would say, “I have no favorites.” But if you asked each of my siblings who was our parents favorite each would say “I was.” But how could that be. How could we all feel that special?

Sibling rivalry, of course, occurs in many families, especially when the children are young. Sometimes it occurs even into adulthood. How many did you think as a child, teenager or adult of your siblings? “Mom always liked you the best”. It is as if there wasn’t enough love, attention, or approval to go around and thus we continue to compete for our fair share. What parent hasn’t heard the pitiful cry? **“But that’s not fair?”** Anyone who hasn’t see me after the service and I think I can connect you up so that you can experience what I am talking about.

These feelings and this kind of behavior can and do carry over into our other relationships... We are conditioned by the world in which we live to see life as some sort of contest for power, wealth, approval, and fame.

We want to get the best grades, the best jobs, make the most money, and have the nicest car... We strive to get ahead... We are always on the look for number uno... for ourselves... we are always on the alert and ever ready to identify that which we perceive as not being fair to us....

After all if we can't get ahead we at least need to preserve the status quo... Let them pay their dues... I did... That is the motto of the self-made person... We all too quickly complain loudly... or silently, when favors go to someone else who we think is less deserving than ourselves.

You see part of our problem is that we really do think we are special... we truly believe that we are someone's favorite person... and that certain person who is no other than ourselves... the truth be known we are our own favorite person.

My friends while the world may say that there is nothing wrong with that... Why the world may say that is just a healthy dose of self-esteem... God's word calls that idolatry... What does the first commandment say... no other God's ... that also means ourselves... you see my friends its not self-esteem that we need its Christ esteem that we need..

It not more personal attention that we need.... but more personal reflection.. on not only who and what we are... but also to whom we belong... It is not more prideful slaps on the back for the work of our own hands... but contemplation that we can do nothing apart from Christ.

My friends... in a world who's motto is.... **what have you done for me lately**... it is not hard to drift into this the wrong type of thinking... In a world that places more and more demands upon us and seeks to motivate us by the bestowing of material wealth we all too often succumb to the sin of self-centeredness... it becomes all too often to **believe that we are special because of something we have done or deserve**. The truth be known my brothers and sisters... this attitude is alive and well in the church also...

It's easy to understand the feelings of the laborers in today's gospel story... Whether it was a true story or whether it was an illustration that our Lord was using to make his point... I leave that up to you to find out the other side of glory if you are so interested... But like many stories... fiction often intimates real life. They had, of course agreed to work for the usual daily wage... it was fair... and to have work to be able to earn a living in and of itself is a blessing indeed. But when they say that these Johnny-come-late-lies receiving the same amount ... they were so sure that they would be rewarded more generously. After all they had worked 12 hours. Was it fair that they received the same amount as those who had worked one hour? **Obviously not... they were special...** they had worked longer and harder... **they deserved to be rewarded more. After all would that not be fair...**

And so they grumbled.... If we are honest with ourselves, we will probably admit that maybe we would grumble to... Given the fallen sinful nature of man... some of us would probably be raising up a storm... why we would be out picketing ... the poor man's vineyard... and organizing a boycott **by Jove we would teach this ignorant old dirt farmer a lesson in fairness.**

But remember the first verse of this story.... The kingdom of heaven is like.... The kingdom of heaven is like....

What if God's kingdom.. is a place where there is no contest... What if "fair" isn't even a word that is used in God's kingdom... But Pastor Tim you say doesn't the Golden rule tell us to be fair... doesn't it say do unto others as you would have them do unto to you..... Isn't that being fair?

In the kingdom of God... Grace, mercy... and peace are the Words by which we operate. Having received grace and mercy from our heavenly father we then in turn by his spirit lavish it upon others.

Jesus said 13:**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

Fair is a word that is of this world and has no place in the realm of almighty God. My friends the truth is simple..... God isn't fair..... not in the earthly meaning of the word.... He never treats us or gives to us what we have earned or truly deserve... He instead bestows upon us **Grace... Mercy... and Peace.**

God is righteous and just and thus in the eternal sense he must is also fair. In the eternal sense for God to be fair he must also be fair to himself and that is where Jesus comes in... You see the world and God use to different definitions for what is fair... In our world fairness is defined in reference to ourselves.... in the kingdom of God fairness is defined in reference to God himself... the father... the son and the holy Ghost.

You say... Now you really got me confused... Don't worry if your having trouble getting yo ur mind around that concept... I refer you back to our O.T. lesson for the Prophet Isaiah writes 55: 8 "**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

There are some simple truths to Remember about the kingdom of God...fairness and eternal life.... And the first truth to remember is that Its God's kingdom... and His ways are not our ways.... And all we can say to that is... Praise be to God... alleluia amen... thank you Jesus....

But there are also some other simple truths to Remember about the Kingdom of God... fairness and especially eternal life... And the truth number one... **is the first truth that the workers in our story and we often forget.**

Truth #1 about eternal life: You don't deserve it. You don't deserve eternal life. Neither do I. Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. Think back over your life, what have you done to deserve eternal life? Be honest, do you really think you deserve to live forever in the glorious presence of God the creator of everything? Maybe you think you do. Maybe you think you deserve eternal life. Maybe you are thinking to yourself, "Sure I deserve eternal life, I deserve heaven because I am already living in hell." Well, your life may be awful, perhaps the things you are currently going through are terrible, but will that qualify you for eternal life? Let me answer that by directing you to open your Bibles to John 6:47 NIV. **I tell you the truth; he who believes has everlasting life.**

Truth #2 about eternal life: Every believer has eternal life. Knowing Jesus is powerful and able to help you is not enough either. To be a believer in Jesus is to put all your trust in Him. To only turn to him for help. Martin Luther puts it this way: To fear love and trust in Him above all things. Actually that is Luther's explanation to the first commandment. That commandment is found in Exodus 20:3 "Never have any other god." You see, to be a believer is to believe that Jesus is God and to put all your trust and faith in him. Every one who is a believer has eternal life.

For **truth #3 about eternal life:** Turn to John 6:44. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. Just as you cannot decide what is fair concerning God...**For Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"**

You cannot either decide to follow Jesus. You cannot meet Jesus halfway. God must bring you to Jesus. I know this truth about eternal life upsets people. But I refer you back to our lesson for the day... How does it begin again... the kingdom of God is like..... The owner the master goes looking for the workers.. he summons them... he sets the wages...

The 4th truth about eternal life can be found in...Turn to 2 Cor. 5:17 **Whoever is a believer in Christ is a new creation.** The old way of living has disappeared. A new way of living has come into existence. Paul calls believing in Jesus a "new way of living" or we might call it a "New Life." In other words, when God brings you to faith in Jesus you are born again! And then it is not you that lives but Christ that lives within you.

God gives the gift of faith. When we have faith, we have eternal life. And when we have eternal life we have a new life in Christ. Those are truths about eternal life, but there is still one truth left, which I think is the most controversial and even offensive truth of the all.

Truth #5 about eternal life: John 3:16 "So loved the world." Look at those 4 words, "so loved the world." At first those words don't seem to threatening at all do they? We look at them and we say, "the world that means me!" We find comfort in those words. It is good to know that God loves you, that he wants you to have eternal life. But that is only part of what life to the world means. That is only the part that satisfies us. God's desire is much bigger than you and me.

The world, not only does it mean you, and you, and you and even you but it also means the checker at the grocery store. It means the person who delivers your mail. It means, and here is the offensive part, the person who fired you, the supervisor who gave you that lousy unfair evaluation, the person who molested your kids, the drunk driver who killed your family, the gang that harasses you at school, the teacher that failed you, the guy who stole your car, the person who broke into your house, the Muslim extremist that killed our countrymen... or just the person who somehow seems to tormented you every day,

Yes, Jesus gave his life for you and for me, but he didn't stop there, he gave his life so that those people, all people could have life, eternal life. Does this offend you? Do think that certain people shouldn't be allowed into heaven? The skinheads, the molesters, murders and the like? If you think that way, and I am sure you do because I too often think that way, then what you and I are really saying is that "I am better than them, I deserve eternal life whereas they don't!"

Of course thinking that way means that we have ignored rule #1: You don't deserve eternal life and I don't deserve eternal. Jesus has paid for your sins and my sins, he has bought us. But he has also bought every person on the earth.

And here we find ourselves back with the grumbling labors in our Gospel lesson today... Have you forgotten... They wanted the master to be fair... but the master desired to be merciful... The truth be known my brother and sisters we are such lousy stewards of the treasure of the kingdom that we would make terrible Lords... But thanks be to God that again his ways are not our ways nor his thoughts our thoughts.

For Exodus 33:19 declares **And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.**

Nita's story.... If only for Nita ... if only for you....

Hear the Good News: Your sins have been forgiven, they are no more. You thought you could earn eternal life. God's price is perfect obedience. You could not and cannot provide it, so Jesus obeyed perfectly to the point of death for you. You were selfish with the good news, Jesus gave his life for the whole world. He gave the good news to the apostles, who gave the good news to others who gave to others and so on until you and I heard it for ourselves.

My friends for all too long we have by commission and omission kept that good news away from your enemies, Jesus died for his. Turn to Romans 5:10 If the death of his Son restored our relationship with God while we were still his enemies, we are even more certain that, because of this restored relationship, the life of his Son will save us. Jesus gave his life for you while you were his enemy!

That is unheard of! What happens when you turn against the powers that are in charge? My friends from China and Vietnam can tell you. When you go against the ruling powers you become an enemy of them. The ruling powers look at their enemies as a threat and those powers hunt down their enemies and kill them.

You and I were enemies of God, but instead of hunting us down to kill us, He sacrificed His Beloved Son Jesus so that we would not be his enemies anymore. Instead we are now God's children. God's son Jesus did not stay dead, he rose again from the dead on the third day, on a Sunday. And so God's children, you and I gather every Sunday to thank God, that we are no longer his enemies, to thank God that we are his children. To thank God that we have eternal life. To Praise him because he is merciful

"For His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways," "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts...."

To Jesus be the glory... to us be the peace ... in his mighty name we pray... Amen.

Readings selected from 18th Sunday after Pentecost Series A.

OLD TESTAMENT

NIV Isaiah 55:6 Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

EPISTLE

NIV Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

GOSPEL

NIV Matthew 20:1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5 So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 6 About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 7 "'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' 9 "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' 16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."