

## A Sermon for DaySpring

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*What Really Matters*

Luke 10.25-37

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In our Gospel reading in Luke, a man comes to Jesus with a question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It is posed to the one person who may have the answer.

It’s a question for the ages, even more than we may realize. Eternal life is not just how do I have life after death? Or how do I go to heaven when I die? In the ancient meaning, eternal life has no beginning and no end. It’s something other than the life I have, not just more of it. The idea that such a thing is possible is mystical, audacious even: how may I become part of that Life that transcends life as we know it? He knew what he was asking and may have had a suspicion of whom he was asking it. Only God’s life, the life of the Divine is without beginning and without end. His question then--can you feel the force and wonder of it--how can I become part of the life of God?

Consider the profound nature of this question.

He’s studied the scriptures; he knows them well. For him, like for many, the more you learn, the more questions you have. True education doesn’t just arrive at answers. Good answers lead to bigger and more profound questions. This Torah expert comes to the end of all questions, which is a fundamental, foundational, quest at the heart of faith: what must I do to take part in the life of God? He isn’t just laying a trap for Jesus. And he isn’t just asking ‘what’s the least I can do and get away with it?’ He’s on the quest at the heart of humanity’s spiritual aspiration, and at the source of our deepest frustration and even despair.

In modern terms the question is something like this: *Isn’t there more to life than this?*

From the simple to the profound, this is the soul search of one who has read all the books, knows all the hermeneutical theories, has the degrees on the wall. His heart is still tender beneath all the vestments. He still wants to do the right thing, still wants to be the right person. He wants to be holy and wants to taste the life of God. So, he asks, “Is this it, or is there more?”

I stumbled on a conversation recently that went like this:

A person asks: “Isn’t there more to life? Get up, go to work, come home, make dinner, go sleep, and repeat the cycle. Nothing is quite terrible, but nothing is quite right either. Like this can't be it. I'm ready to take on the world. Not be stuck living some average life doing the same [things] over and over till I die. Some people really think this is how life is, and I

refuse to believe so. I'm searching for answers. Right now money and things aren't doing it for me. I think I'm searching for a higher purpose and challenge.” (from a Reddit thread)

There it is--this existential sigh at the heart of human life: *Is there more to life than... this?* Yes, in the conversation that unfolded, others chime in with great confidence: “There is! And you can have it...” The answers rattled off, one right after another: travel, get a hobby, watch better tv shows, do psychedelics.

For the seeker, these are just same song and a different verse. Another person adds their own sigh to the conversation, saying, “I have the same question on my mind, but my answer seems to be bigger than just saving up and traveling. everyone says that. There has to be more than just this routine we are almost brainwashed to live in. go to school, get married, have a kid, complain about your husband. everyone does the same \_\_\_ thing, isn't there more to life than this? Isn't there more than what we see everyone do? And do other people think of things like this, too? Or am I the only one? Are other people comfortable with doing a routine day after day? I want answers or paths that lead me to these answers because I'm not sure what to do with my life, or if any of it even matters.”

If you ever wonder if the gospel matters in the modern world or to the generation that is coming up, just take a peak at these substantive questions that are being cast out there from one person to another anonymous person, just looking for an answer that satisfies something deep in the soul. No, you are not the only one.

Among all the creatures—the trees and animals—only humans we assume have this question burning in their hearts. All creatures have the fingerprints of their creator within them. Humans, created in the image of God, have this holy dissatisfaction within them when they examine their get-up, go-to-work, come-home, go-to-bed, complain-about-other-people lives. Some people, with a fire burning in their bones grow from there into the likeness of God. They are those who discover there is more to life than meeting daily needs, pursuing material ends, satisfying personal cravings and desires. There's a holy suspicion that there's got to be something more than this. Something bigger and more expansive, some truth just beyond our grasp, some meaning just beyond what we can see with these eyes.

The man asked Jesus because Jesus appeared to know that there is something more to this life, and he looked like he knew where it is. It's like being a beggar and meeting the one who might know where the bread is. He had something the man was searching for. Others said the same when they met him, “Isn't this Joseph's son? He speaks as one with authority, not like the scribes and the Pharisees.” He's different. This is a kind of test of Jesus that Luke is describing: the kind of test you dare to put to someone you meet who is unlike anyone you've ever met before. Here's a person who has a way and a look in their eyes that suggests they have found something more. And you have to know: Is this guy for real? Everything hinges on it.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What does the law say?” Jesus asked the expert in the Law.

The man answered: love.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus replied, “Yes, that’s it.”

The life of God is the way of Love. Practice love in any way you can big or small, prudent or wildly generous, and you are—as you do that thing--participating in the eternal life that is the life of God.

This is at the heart of Christian life, but what does it mean? To find out, we can look to the monastics who devoted their lives in pursuit of participation in the life of God in everything. And their wisdom, honed over years, centuries of commitment to the pursuit, can seem pretty mundane. There’s not a path to secret knowledge, or gnostic secrets to be uncovered; the path is as plain as the one you’re walking and God is as close as the person who is right with you and right in front of you.

It’s the wisdom of Deuteronomy, “God’s Word is not too hard for you nor is it too far away. It is not up in heaven that you should have to wonder who will go up and get it. It’s not beyond the sea, that you should ask who will go over there and get it. The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.” The monastic wisdom of the ages is that the love that is the life of God is as near as your daily life and your neighbor’s life, and so: work and pray, tend the garden, share your table; commit to the community, resolve your conflicts with honesty and reconciliation, deal with your anger and hurt--don’t let them become your idol or your crutch. Rejoice and lament. Receive the stranger as Christ in your presence.

There’s no secret way other than living in love in the life that you have. The way into God’s life is in your life made whole and your life redeemed. God’s life is eternal and ongoing, and we’re invited to step into the flow. We were created to live in the flow, to take part in God’s life and be conduits of God’s life in all creation. When our lives participate in God’s eternal life, we discover what Life is when it’s stripped of self-focused limitations: the way down is the way up; and the way inward is also the way outward. The love of God doesn’t run in parallel to the love of neighbor. The love of God runs through love of neighbor. And who embodies that more fully than Jesus--in word, in deed, in daily life, in invitation, and death on cross. Jesus looks so different to the eyes of people around him because they’ve lost what he has, which is what they were created for. And some smoldering ember of true life deep within them is fanned to flame in his presence.

St. Bonaventure describes God as a fountain fullness, an overflowing source of love and goodness, emanating outward. Eternal life is God’s life; it isn’t just an extended duration of life and not just life after death. Eternal life is a quality of life that participates in the life that is Life that is from the beginning and will be forever. And for which everything that is, is

intended to participate. Eternal life is a union of your contingent being with the divine life of God. And this is possible. It's right there around us and within us every day. Jesus said this is possible, and in him, it is made possible within us.

We call him the good Samaritan, but that's now how the story describes him. He's good because he's merciful and compassionate. He, alone, goes to a man beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. He picks him up, sets him on his animal, tends to his wounds, carries him to an innkeeper, pays for his care, and promises, "I'll be back to pay what is needed." The *merciful* Samaritan is a picture—not just of a generous act of kindness of an unlikely hero subverting the religiosity of the professional establishment. It is that, but this story is of God loose in the world. The Samaritan is a picture of Jesus. He comes when others walk on by—he scoops us up, heals our wounds, gives his life for us that we may be made whole and give our lives for others. And he will not stop until the broken are healed and life is restored in all Creation.

I think this is good news. I think this is tremendous news. I think this is news for the hope and salvation of the world.

When we do likewise, when we do anything likewise, when we take a small step of openhandedness, generosity, mercy, empathy, self-sacrifice for another person or creature, we do it in the name of Jesus. When we do anything like this to give of ourselves for someone else, we taste eternal life. And when you do, you grow hungry for more because we are created in the image of a God and made for relationship with a God who has already drawn near in compassion and self-sacrifice. God delights in restoring, gathering, blessing his creatures—not because we have earned it, but because he loves us to unto himself. Divine grace invites us to taste and see the Lord is good.

The Lord is good, in this life, in the life to come, and in the life both at the same time beyond our grasp and right there in front of our eyes and in our hands. This path bends back around to Jesus. The everyday paths we walk hold---teem with the possibility of encounters with God waiting around every corner and life with God bursting at the seams of all creation, even creation where it is travail. The man knew the path all along, even more than he realized: *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.