

Entering Eternal Life

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

24 May 2026

Children's Talk: What Lasts Forever?

What are some of the things that make life feel happy and good?

A man asked Jesus how he could get eternal life; in other words, he wanted to know not just how he could get something that felt sort of good for a little while; he wanted to know how he could have a good and happy life that would last forever.

Jesus gave a two-part answer. The first part was about what he had to do and how he had to treat other people:

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

He said to Him, "Which ones?"

Jesus said, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour your father and your mother, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" (Matthew 19:16-20)

The young man had in fact done all these things, but still didn't seem to have found the kind of happiness that lasts forever. And so Jesus told him he also had to give some things up:

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Matthew 19:21-22)

The man could do all the right things; as long as he didn't have to give anything up.

But when he heard that he also had to give up the things he loved, he couldn't do it.

[Illustration with carrying objects]

What might you have to give up in order to be more loving and kind to other people, and to follow the Lord fully?

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We are going to carry on with this idea of eternal happiness, specifically with eternal life in heaven. We are born here into this natural world in ignorance and self-centredness. As we go through life we face challenges and limitations, and even the worldly things we receive that are pleasant and good are also fleeting; they all pass away; they cannot fully satisfy our desires and needs. The promise that the Lord gives is that there is something more than this flawed, limited, temporary world: there is a spiritual world beyond this one in which pain is removed and God's presence, and all the joy and meaning that comes with that, can be fully felt. We are given a glimpse of this world to come in the book of Revelation:

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:3-4)

That's an amazing promise. The important question then, not just for us this morning but for our lives, is how do we get there? What do we have to do so that someday we can enter heaven?

The Word indicates that the path to heaven is through the Lord, Jesus Christ. He indicated to His followers that they did know the way, but they weren't sure what He meant:

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"
Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:5-6)

In another instance Jesus used the analogy of a door to a sheepfold, saying,

Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the

door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10:7-9)

He also connected this to seeing and having faith in Him:

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:40)

The Word is clear over and over again that Jesus is the way, the door, the means of entering heaven. Nor is He just a means, He is *the* means; in other words, apart from the Lord there is no salvation. So here is, in a sense, the answer to one of life's greatest questions: how do we enter heaven? Through the Lord, Jesus Christ!

But we cannot just stop here at this knowledge. Jesus makes it clear that faith consists in doing something:

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father in heaven**. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who practice lawlessness!**" (Matthew 7:21-23)

Calling on the Lord, and even doing certain things in His name, is not sufficient. It's like building a piece of furniture. I have here some tools and some materials. These things are necessary if I want to build something. But just having them does virtually nothing for actually getting something done. They are indeed necessary; but they are not sufficient. I need instructions for how to use them, and I need to then actually apply myself to working with them. The same is true of faith: I can have the absolute conviction that the Lord requires honesty, and yet still be blatantly dishonest with friends; I might know perfectly well how destructive hatred of enemies is and yet carry on with an attitude of vengeance and disdain towards those who wrong me; I may consistently apply the Lord's standards to the behaviour of other people but never turn and apply those same standards to myself. This is not the faith that leads

to heaven. To have faith but not embody that faith is like standing at the beginning of the path but not walking it, to stand at the door but to not enter it, to see the Lord from afar but not go to Him. The Lord is the access point into heaven; but we have to follow Him if we want to enter.

This can start to seem like having to earn heaven, which isn't quite right. Part of the reason it feels like that is that the initial question is off too. I started with the question, what do we have to *do* to get to heaven? There are things we have to do, but the real question is, what kind of person do I have to *be* to get to heaven? I have to be a faithful person: faithful to the Lord in keeping His commandments and living His teachings. Now someone could do those exact same actions selfishly and with ulterior motives, yet they would not be a faithful person. But without doing those things we cannot become a faithful person. It's not that the actions earn us a place in heaven; but rather the actions, done from a sincere and loving heart, for the sake of the Lord and for the sake of others, are what shape us into the person who can receive and be received into heaven. It's like practicing a skill. Someone who every day sits down at the piano and goes through their exercises and scales and practices a piece will become a better piano player; it's not that because they put in the work they are now entitled to be gifted with the skill; it's that the very act of doing a certain thing, consistently over time, in itself has transformed them into a more skilled piano player. Keeping the Lord's commandments does not earn us the right to heaven; but it does allow the Lord to make us into heavenly people.

But what about the billions of people who don't have the Lord? Are they denied access to heaven? The same principles actually apply. To get to heaven a person needs the Lord; there is no salvation apart from the Lord. But the truth is that

anyone sincerely living a good life does already have the Lord. The Teachings of the New Church put it this way (using the term “gentiles” to mean “non-Christians”):

Gentiles who have lived a moral life and in mutual charity and innocence, are regenerated in the other life. While they live in the world the Lord is present with them in charity and innocence, for there is nothing of charity and innocence except from the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* §1032)

Just as a Christian who knows about the Lord but does nothing with that knowledge does not truly know the Lord, a non-Christian who has little to no knowledge about the Lord and yet sincerely lives as the Lord wants *does* truly know the Lord. The Lord is present in that individual’s love and innocence, even if not in their explicit awareness.

Not only do they have the Lord, they also have the heart of faith, even if they lack the specifics of faith. They have cultivated the ground in which faith can be received as it were. The Teachings of the New Church point out that truth can only be truly received from good:

In the wide world all those who have lived in good are of the Lord's mercy received and saved; for good is that which receives truth. The good of life is the very ground for the seed, that is, for the truth. Evil of life cannot possibly receive it... (*Secrets of Heaven* §2590)

It does not matter how good the seeds are if the ground in which it lands is bad. Likewise, it does not matter how true one’s faith is, if it is rooted in evil and selfishness. A person who has developed a good and loving heart can receive faith in a way that someone who is selfish cannot.

Imagine these two scenarios: someone never knew anything about the Lord Jesus Christ, and so did not do or believe in the specific things the Lord commands; yet he did, through his own religion, come to be a loving and humble person. He lived for the sake of other people and honoured God as best he could. He dies and goes to the other world. He will there encounter the Lord: the Lord who is the very

embodiment of the values the man has held all his life; the Lord, who is the source of everything good and loving that the man has tried to live up to; the Lord who above all teaches us to love the neighbour. Won't the Lord welcome him into heaven, and won't the man gladly receive the Lord, because his heart is already dedicated to what the Lord stands for?

In contrast, consider a Christian who has the best possible image of God and the clearest instructions on how to follow Him; but has lived selfishly and for himself alone, disdaining other people as lesser. When He goes to the other life he too will encounter the Lord, and while he may have had faith in the Lord intellectually, he will have to confront the reality that the Lord Jesus Christ is the diametric opposite of his lived values. If he is unwilling to give up the life of selfishness that he has made for himself, there is no way that he would willingly enter the kingdom of the Lord in which all selfishness is rejected. Faith is incredibly important; but even more important is a heart that is willing and prepared to receive faith.

Knowing this truth can shape how we view God, other people, and ourselves. It shapes our view of God by allowing us to be grateful that the Lord provides the means for every human being to have some relationship with Himself, and the opportunity to enter into eternal joy and happiness. The Lord loves every single human being equally and fully. He would never abandon any of us simply for what we believe.

Knowing this truth shapes how we view others because it deepens what we look for when we consider people: it is not their beliefs or faith that most fully define them, but what they love and value. We cannot fully see that of course, only the Lord sees the heart itself; but we can still do our best to look beyond surface ideas and view someone based on how they treat others and how they conduct themselves.

Knowing this truth shapes how we view ourselves by providing humility: if you are a Christian, you are not the only one that God has chosen, nor are you superior to anyone else for having the identity of Christian. If you want that identity to mean anything then you must live it, and grow in it, and allow it to shape your behaviours and mindsets. Having faith in the Lord is an incredibly powerful and important tool; but it is one that must be nurtured and put into practice, wisely and lovingly.

Life in this world is temporary and limited; but the Lord has an eternity of happiness in store for us in heaven. If we want to receive that blessing then the most important thing we can do today is start embodying our faith, so that the Lord can change us into new and heavenly people.