

*“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Do you know who would never have asked such a question? The thief on the cross. His story looks sad and hopeless. Yet it has a beautiful ending. The man who kneels down before Jesus in our text has a story that many would envy. He is wealthy. He has a good reputation for outwardly he is a good and decent man. But his story ends sadly. We need to contrast these two men this morning. It is vitally important to our soul’s salvation.

Now, there are similarities. Both men are contemplating where they will go when they die. Both men are in the presence of Jesus. Both address Him, and both receive a response.

*“Good teacher,”* says the one. He’s right. Jesus is good for He is God. And Jesus is a teacher. But the man stops with that. Is that how you pray to Jesus? Do you begin your prayers with *“Good Teacher”*? You call Him Lord, don’t you? You call Him Savior. You even simply call Him by His name, Jesus. The name Jesus means Savior.

And so also, the thief on the cross turns and speaks to address Him. *“Jesus,”* he says, *“(Savior), remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”* He addresses Jesus rightly. He speaks to Him out of faith. No *“Good teacher”* from his lips. He is speaking to his Lord. He turns to address his Savior.

*“Good teacher,”* says the man in our text, *“what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* And why wouldn’t he ask this? He does not call Jesus his God. He does not call him his Savior. If this man is to be saved, he must do it himself. Jesus is teacher, not Savior. The man seeks His advice, but that’s it. And so he asks, *“What must I do?”*

How different is the way the thief addresses Jesus. Nothing in what he himself must do. And how could there be? He is hanging from a cross. He has no wealth to sell and give to the poor. If he must go out and do something to gain eternal life, he’s screwed; he’s damned. He has nothing to give. He can do nothing. He is nothing. Nothing but a wretched thief dying for his crimes.

His focus is on Jesus, not on himself. The man in our text asks Jesus what he must do. He places the action with himself. But the thief places it with Jesus. *“Remember me, Jesus, when You come into Your kingdom.”* The thief does nothing. Nothing but die. It’s Jesus who does the remembering. *“Remember me, Jesus,”* says the thief. And to him Jesus gives a beautiful promise. *“Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.”*

Where is this promise to the man in our text? It’s lacking, isn’t it? And it’s because the man is lacking. *“You lack one thing,”* Jesus tells him. Not forty things, or ten, or even two things; just one. What does this man lack? What is that one thing? It’s Jesus. The man lacks Jesus. He has wealth. He has lived a good life. He is no murderer, or gossip, or adulterer, and he is no thief. He is good and complete in every way except one. He has everything but Jesus.

The thief has nothing except Jesus. And because he has Jesus, he has the promise of eternal life in Paradise.

What do you have? You have more than the thief had. You have possessions, many possessions. You have a better reputation than he had. But we know, from what Jesus told the man in our text, that to have everything except Jesus is to have nothing.

Friend, are you baptized into Jesus Christ? Then you have Jesus because He has you. In your baptism Jesus gives to you the same promise of eternal life that He gave to the thief.

You see, the man who knelt down before Jesus did not understand that an inheritance cannot be earned. It can only be given. "*What must I do,*" he asked, "*to inherit eternal life?*" Nothing. A son or daughter does nothing to earn the inheritance. The inheritance is given to them simply because they are born into the family. A servant in that same family can work his tail off. Yet he receives no inheritance because he is a servant and not a son.

Your baptism declares that you are sons and daughters of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. This is who you are, and nothing can ever change that. You can work your tail off doing your best to obey each and every Commandment of God. And we should. We are not called to be lazy sons and daughters. We are called to obedience. Yet your work, your obedience to the Law, or lack of it, does not and cannot change God's promise to you in your baptism.

Your baptism saves you, writes the Apostle Peter. It gives you eternal life. It does this because it delivers to you the forgiveness of your sins. That thief was a terrible sinner. But his sinful life did not prevent Jesus from giving him Paradise.

I, too, am a terrible sinner. Aren't you? Do not fear. Be comforted in Jesus. He forgives you. Not just some of you. He forgives each and everyone of you. Your sinful life cannot prevent Him from giving you the inheritance of Paradise. You did not earn it. He did by His death on the cross for you. And it is yours, for He gives it to you. And no one, no one, my friend, can take it from you. Amen.