What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

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Preacher: Rev. Paul Carter

[0:00] St. John's Shaughnessy Church As an ex-military man, I love coming to this church and pausing to reflect on all that went on that's remembered in that stained glass window there.

And I'm reminded of a story I once heard of a substitute preacher who stood in the pulpit and noticed a piece of old cardboard filling in the gap in a beautiful but broken stained glass window. You know, he said, standing in for such an eminent preacher, I feel a bit like that cardboard in the stained glass window, a poor substitute for the real thing.
After the service, one of the congregation greeted him warmly at the door. I want you to know, he said, you weren't a piece of cardboard this morning, you were a real pain. Now, as somebody who did a course in the United Kingdom that could have set me on a path to become a management consultant, I am poking fun at myself as much as those of you who are involved in consultancy or in the business world.
But I came across a mock memorandum sent to Jesus, son of Joseph, woodcrafter, carpenter's shop, Nazareth, from the Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem.
[1:52] Dear Sir, thank you for submitting the resumes of the 12 men you've picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests.

We've not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you're undertaking.
They don't have the team concepts. We'd recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability. Simon Peter, for example, is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper.
Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.
We feel it's our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.
[3:08] One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He's a man of ability and resourcefulness. He meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places.

He's highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All the other profiles are self-explanatory, and we wish you success in your new venture.
Well, for the benefits of business people, and I hope for all of us, I aim to show this morning that Christianity demands some serious cost-benefit analysis.
Not once, but constantly for each of us, which is why I've entitled my message this morning, What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?
And as is my custom, I have three short points, the first of which I've called the cost. This incident, which you may care to turn to in St. Mark's Gospel and chapter 10, you'll find it on page 44 of the New Testament section of the Bibles in front of you.
[4:20] It would be rather lovely on this still day to hear the rustling of leaves as you turn to the page. Page 44. This incident is recorded in three of the four Gospels.

A man runs up to Jesus and kneels before him. We sense his seriousness. We sense the urgency in his pace. We sense how fervent he is.

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It is left to Matthew to tell us that he's young, to Luke to tell us that he's a ruler, and here Mark to tell us that it's a man and that he's wealthy.
Hence the so-called title very often of the rich young ruler. Good teacher, he says in verse 17. What must I do to inherit eternal life?
He's obviously conscious that he's not got hold of it yet. He's troubled deep down in his spirit. He wants to do something.
[5:26] Like my friends who left school in the late 70s and worked through the 80s in London as the so-called yuppies, or the young captains and majors with whom I worked for 16 years.

They are used to living fast and getting what they want. This man, I suspect, was used to getting what he wanted.
But Jesus simply says, why do you call me good? In verse 18. You may think that you're good, but actually only God is good.
Verse 19, you know the commandments. Don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't defraud, honour your father and mother. And he dared to look Jesus in the eye and say, well, teacher, all these I've observed from my youth.
Very probably, he was only able to convince himself that he'd kept them because his life was predicated on the fact that he had all sorts of servants rushing after him, making sure that he was never ceremonially unclean.
[6:32] But clearly, it seems to me, he had misunderstood all ten of the commandments if he thought that he really had lived up to them. But Jesus, from verse 21, doesn't want to get into that sort of argument, you know, what percentage have you kept this week?

We are simply told, Jesus looked at him and loved him. His heart went out to this young man. You want to do something? Okay.
Well, go and sell what you own and give your money to the poor. If you do that, then you will certainly have treasure in heaven. And then come and follow me. Come and join this little band of followers I'm putting together who are living with me, walking with me, listening to me, learning from me by my example and my teaching.
But we're told in verse 22, at that saying, this young man's countenance fell. And he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.
He was shocked by the audacity of Jesus' response. And he went away sad because he so wanted the security of eternal life.
[7:53] But he wanted it on his terms because that was how he was used to living. For him, it was possessions.

It was money. It was his hot button. That provided him with security in this world. That provided him with a tremendous status in the culture.
That had become for him an idol. In direct contravention of one of the Ten Commandments that he claimed to have fulfilled.
The second mentioned in Exodus 20 and verse 4. So Jesus dared to challenge, to reject his false god, his idol.
And to pin all of his hopes on him. Come on, Jesus said. Sell all you have. Leave your old way of life. And come and follow me.
[8:51] And you know, ladies and gentlemen, what I find most scary about this story. Yes, it's scary that the young man walked away from eternal life and joining the Twelve.

Wasn't prepared to pay the price. That's scary. But what I have to say I find even more scary. Is that Jesus let him go. No rushing after him.
No, oh well there, there, there. I didn't really mean it. Let's compromise on 80%. And I want to suggest to each of us that there is a cost involved in following Jesus.
For some of us, it may be that like this young man, we have turned our love of money into an idol.
For others of us sitting here today, it may be those career aspirations that you have that dominate your world and your worldview.
Can even fall into being our partner when we idolize a partner. Or our intellect, those of us who have fabulous intellects and work in the academic world of UBC.
[10:10] It can be pride or one's family, one's pension plan, one's health. Could even be one's passion for music that has now become an idol. Or cooking or gardening.

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Or one's children. Or that beloved cottage of yours on an island that you opened up a couple of weeks ago. And Jesus dares to say to us, Worship God alone.
Have no idols before him. And follow me. Follow me with your time and your talents and your treasure.
Christianity is not meant to be a prayerful social club for an hour and a half on a Sunday morning. This Christianity is so much more than the Arbutus club at prayer. There is a cost in being a Christian.
[11:12] And secondly, there is a danger from verse 23 and following. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God.

And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.
And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, With men it's impossible. But not with God.
For all things are possible with God. You know, compared with most people on this planet, We are all incredibly wealthy.
Very hard. For those of us who live here on the west side, Jesus says, To enter the kingdom of God.
[12:14] It's not impossible. But it is very hard. It is actually easier for the largest Middle Eastern animal To go through one of the very smallest holes.

The hole, the eye of a needle. Two or three years ago, To celebrate the millennium, I was privileged to lead a team of 20 army chaplains To the Sinai Desert and up into Israel.
We were going to accumulate a number of miles running early each morning. 10 miles, 10 kilometers. No, 10 miles, that's right. 10 miles a day. 10 miles a day. And we accumulated 2,000 miles as we ran in the desert.
And having run and got it over by sort of half past nine Before the sun was too hot, We then did a variety of other things. One day we went camel riding. They are stubborn animals.
They are clumsy animals. They are aggressive animals. It was all I could do to keep the jolly thing in a straight line, Let alone get through the eye of a needle. It is very hard for each of us, Because it is so easy in this culture, To pin our hope on financial security and material possessions.
[13:39] And not Jesus. And there will be those of us here today, Who perhaps secretly and sometimes more overtly, Are really pinning our hopes for a secure future, On the aggressive medical plans we have in place, And that fabulous pension plan we've been accruing, And those retirement homes we've been painstakingly building.

And verse 26 says again to us today, They were exceedingly astonished and said to Jesus, Then who can be saved?
Ladies and gentlemen, From the words of the New Testament, We cannot buy salvation, No matter how large your pledge, Last fall or this fall.
We cannot earn it, By our social action. We cannot scheme for it, By acquiring power in the world, Or the diocese. We can't attend church so regularly, We imagine we are accumulating spiritual air miles points, Ready for our free trip.
Salvation is promised as a pure gift, Out of God's generous love for us. And the price we are asked to pay, Is that in effect Jesus says, It will cost you everything, For nothing must get in the way of making Jesus Lord.
[15:21] As Canon David Watson once said to me, When I was a young man in a sermon, I heard him preach, If Jesus is not Lord of all, Then is he Lord at all?

So to my third and final point, The benefits. That can accrue. From verse 28 and following, Peter began to say to him, Lo, we have left everything and followed you. I love Peter, don't you?
Mr. Feet first, Peter, Our resident extrovert in the team, Sometimes Mr. Angry, Look Jesus, I have given up rather a lot to come and be your follower.
I had a very secure little fishing business up in Capernaum. Thank you very much. And Jesus says in verse 29, Truly I say to you, There is no one who has left house, Or brothers or sisters, Or mother or father or children or lands, For my sake and for the gospel, Who won't receive a hundredfold in this time.

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Houses, Brothers and sisters and mothers. So there is a cost, But Jesus reminds us today, That there are wonderful benefits of putting him first.
[16:41] That if we do place him first, And give up our idols, We become part of a fabulous new counter-cultural community, That is evident here on the west side, Around the lower mainland, Across Canada, And indeed around the globe.

It has been my privilege, In the last thirty years, To travel around the world, To sit with Christians, In huts made of cow dung, In northern Kenya, And to pray with them.
To visit missionaries, In Nepal and Thailand, To go to be among Christians, In South Africa and Australia, And now to leave, Our homeland of England, And come and here, To settle here in Canada.
We do accrue, A wonderful worldwide network, Of brothers and sisters, Who are linked to us, Because they too name the name of Jesus.
So I am now part of a huge and wonderful, Church family around the globe, And that can be our promise. I have visited, And stayed in the most wonderful houses, Far beyond that which I grew up in, As a result, Of being a committed Christian, And seeking to serve, And honour the Lord.
[18:07] And I have visited, Some of the most humble homes, Around the world. We are part, Of a new community, That God is raising up.

But we are told equally, And I must not shirk, This verse, That yes, There will be houses, And brothers, And sisters, In verse 30, And mothers and children, And lands, With persecutions, But in the age to come, Eternal life.
This gospel of Mark, Was written originally, The original readers and hearers, Would have been Christians in Rome, Who were suffering overt persecution, For their faith.
Not for them, The cosy lifestyle of the west side. No, They were thrown before lions, For naming the name of Christ. They were rolled in tar, And set a light, To light the Appian way, Up to Nero's palace.
But for us, Well I want to suggest, That for many of us, Who are Christians, We may not experience, That overt persecution, But we will certainly, Be misunderstood, In this culture.
[19:21] We may well be teased, As I was once, Mercilessly teased, When I worked as a hospital porter. We will possibly be ostracised, We may be overlooked, For promotion.

But our suffering, Is as nothing, Compared to our brothers and sisters, In Sudan today. For I spoke with the Reverend Bernard, Some eight weeks ago, And he told me, That every night, He goes to bed, Wondering whether tonight, Will be his night, When the secret service, Will come, And drag him away, And take him to one of their, Torture houses, And persecute and torture him, Until he is nearly dead, And then throw him back, Onto the streets of Khartoum, And leave him to be dead.
He is willing to pay that price, To name the name of Christ. And as a result of that, Faithfulness, He will inherit, Eternal life.
The rich young ruler, So wanted, Eternal life. But he was not prepared, To pay the price. I've heard it said, Of so called, Full time Christian workers, Well the pay is lousy, But the benefits, Are out of this world.
And that's where they probably are, Ladies and gentlemen. Out of this world. But that's okay. For as I have read, And re-read this passage again, In getting ready for this morning, Over the last few days.
[20:50] I have to say, To myself, As well as to you, For any preacher, Is going to be judged, More severely by God, Than the rest, Of us.

That there is no grounds, For arrogance here. It doesn't matter, That I gave up, A sponsorship, With Heinz, The company, For a business fellowship, All those years ago, To be ordained.
It doesn't matter, That I gave up, Two thirds of my salary package, To leave the army, And come back, To parochial ministry. It doesn't matter, That I have left family, And friends, Back in England.
For verse 31 says, Many that are seemingly first, Will be last, And the last first. And I find it, Very sad, To recall, That it was, Judas Iscariot, One of the twelve, Who listened, To all of this teaching, Who lived with the Lord Jesus, But who at the last, Fell, And allowed his love, Of money, To take him into error, And finally suicide.
What must I do, To inherit eternal life? You and I, Must throw ourselves, On the sheer mercy of God, And we need to do that regularly, We need to be more radical, About putting God first, And having no other idols, I wonder what the danger area, In your life is, I wonder what things, Can

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begin to accrue, And acquire first place, When God alone, Should have first place, Let's ask God, To bring those things to mind, And to do something about it, So that unlike, The rich young ruler, We won't walk away sad, And be allowed to go, Amen.
[22:57] This digital audio file, Along with many others, Is available from the St. John's, shaughnessy website at www.stjohnshaughnessy.org. That address is www.stjohnshaughnessy.org.

On the website you will also find information about ministries, worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy. We hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others.
Thank you.

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