

A city slicker went out to visit his sister on the farm. His sister owned an apple orchard, and it was prime harvest season. His sister needed all the help she could get picking apples in time for selling. After brother took a week's vacation to assist her with the fruit picking, his sister decided she would reward him with a little secret.

She took her younger brother back into the woods behind the orchard. In a clearing hidden away from the prying eyes of the outside world, she led him to a grove of money trees.

This man could hardly believe his eyes. Clusters of dollar bills hanging from twigs, fives scattered throughout, twenties at the ends of the branches, and could he even see fifties growing at the tippy tops?

He got on his knees and started begging his sister, "Please, please, please, let me take one of these trees home with me!"

His sister dropped what appeared to be a discolored, mishappen penny into his outstretched palms. She whispered, "Don't tell *anyone* I gave this to you."

After examining it for a few seconds, the brother threw the gift back at his sister's face and left disgusted saying, "You always held back on me even when we were growing up." Little did this man know that his sister had given him: a rare seed to the money tree.

Now, there is no such thing as a money tree. But this story is not entirely different than the scenario we see in our Gospel text for today. The rich young man comes to Jesus asking Him a question, "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" This exchange with Jesus leads the man to leave saddened because he had great possessions. Little did this young man know that he was staring Eternal Life in the eyes. Like the brother from the city, he threw away the treasure not knowing what it was. BECAUSE HE HIMSELF IS ETERNAL LIFE, JESUS LOVINGLY CALLS YOU TO FOLLOW HIM.

Our problem is that I. We look for a Christless eternal life. We are not unlike the rich young man in this Gospel account. We ask Jesus, "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" And that's a good question, right? We want to know how to get to heaven.

The problem is when we try to boil it down to a one sentence answer, we can miss the big picture. We want to hear we can be saved you just say this one prayer. You just get baptized. You just attend this ten-week set of classes. You just get confirmed. Tick off this set of boxes, and then you've got your ticket to eternal life.

Now, let me be clear here. The Bible teaches that saying a prayer to Jesus sincerely can be the gateway from death to life. The Bible teaches that baptism now saves you. Learning God's Word in a classroom setting always yields fruit

and is beneficial. The rite of Confirmation is a wonderful opportunity to confess your faith in front of the church and the world.

All of these things are important. But the problem is that when we make the goal of Christianity simply to amass head knowledge or a list of hoops to jump through, we miss the point. We're like the little brother who wanted a mature money tree to plopped down in his backyard and didn't recognize the seed put right into his palms.

What the rich young man wanted from Jesus was a thumbs up so he could keep on living life like he always did. The rich young man fooled himself into thinking that he could actually keep the commandments: **“Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.”** He fooled himself because he didn't actually want to change the way he lived.

And we find that we don't like changing either. We want heaven, but we don't want to spend too much time with Jesus while we're there. We want that peace from attending a worship service, but we don't want to give up our late Saturday nights. We like calling God our Father, but we don't like family time with Him.

What we need to realize is that there is no such thing as a Christless eternal life because II. Jesus Himself is eternal life. Why does praying a prayer turning from sin and believing in Jesus grant eternal life? Why does baptism now save you? Why can a Bible class change your life? What is it about confirmation and communion that places heaven in our very palms?

The common thread through all of these is that they deliver you Jesus! Jesus Himself is eternal life! Putting your faith in Jesus, perhaps in the form of praying a prayer for the first time, is not valuable because of the individual words you pray but because Jesus takes you from life to death. Baptism saves you precisely because Jesus is in the water through the word claiming you as His child. God's Word read privately or in a Bible class tells you what Jesus has done and how He loves you. Confirmation is another opportunity to confess that Jesus is the only way to Heaven. Communion delivers you Jesus in bodily form for forgiveness, life, and salvation. The common thread through all of these is that they deliver you Jesus!

Jesus Himself is eternal life. He says, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Jesus is eternal life incarnate. From the time of His conception, to His birth, throughout His life, all the way to His death, He lived a good and perfect life. He kept all the commandments, for you. He faced sin, death, and the devil, for you. He died on the cross for you.

He died to forgive you of your lack of thankfulness as you would rather be doing anything than spending time in prayer and His Word. He died to forgive you

for your pride, thinking that you can keep the commandments. He died to forgive you for taking Him for granted: treating Him like a fire extinguisher in a cupboard you only take out when the house is burning down.

And yet you cannot kill eternal life. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, the first fruits of what He promises us. Eternal life with a body that cannot decay, grow old, or die. Eternal life with Him.

He did all of this not because He wants your money. He doesn't want your right answers or proper prayers. He doesn't want your attempts at perfection. Jesus did all of this because He wants you. Today, III. Jesus lovingly calls you to follow Him.

**“And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”**” What an amazing statement! Jesus looks at him and loves him.

Today, Jesus looks at you and loves you, and says, **“Come, follow me.”** The point is not to balk at how outrageous Jesus' demand was to sell everything. The point is that following Jesus is itself eternal life, so we should let nothing get in the way of following where he leads. Following Him is its own reward.

The more I grow, the more I realize there is just as much value in the journey as in the destination. Our time here on earth gets to be an adventure with Jesus. To have our Christian walk take a backseat to worldly pursuits means we're missing out on eternal life in the here and now. Eternity begins today, and just like the rich young man, Jesus wants you as his travel companion.

The sister picked up the seed and ran to the brother and explained, “It's a seed! I couldn't uproot a tree and risk it dying in transit. Please take this, and care for it as one of your sons.”

And the man did just that, and he found in the process of cultivating this tree from a seed, he learned to take better care of it than he would a transplanted tree. He watered it daily. He fertilized it. He sprayed for bugs and other pests. And after several years of meticulous care, it made the first dollar that sprouted in late August worth more than just the face value. The younger brother learned to take ownership of what had been so graciously gifted to him.

The saving faith you have in Christ is worth so more than that fictional money tree. What's a fortune compared to eternal life? Don't let anything get in the way of listening to Jesus when He calls out, “come, follow me” the risk is too great! Cultivate that faith that has been planted in you. Keep on coming back here to hear God's Word and receive communion. Be constant in prayer. Study His Word in your household and in Bible studies. Jesus lovingly calls you to follow Him, and you'll find that it's worth it. There's a harvest waiting that's worth more than a bushel of fifty-dollar bills. Amen!