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"What is there for us?" - "Eternal life!"

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"WHAT IS THERE FOR US?"

"ETERNAL LIFE!"

By D.R. Knox

The Protestant Faith
The Apostle Peter once asked Jesus a very direct and modern question in Matthew 19:27 "What is there in it for us?" This is the sort of question that is often at the bottom of our minds if not on our lips - what is there in it for us?

St. Peter and his fellow apostles had been following Jesus for two years or more. They had given up their homes and families, they had given up their income, their comfort, their worldly prospects, and so far it had not led anywhere. We may detect a glance back to the old life in Peter's question, "Look, we have left everything. What is there in it for us?" This is the sort of question that once the flush of first enthusiasm wanes, is often asked by Christians, especially by full-time ministers as Peter and the apostles were. We can trace the way St. Peter was thinking by recalling the situation, and the incidents which led up to the question. A young man had come to Jesus to ask Him how he might inherit eternal life. The young man was rich; he owned a good deal of land and property - this would be reflected in his dress - and it brought him the social status and influence in the community which money and property normally ensures. Our Lord's reply was first to direct the young man to think again about the implications of coming to Jesus with his question about eternal life. He had addressed Jesus as "Good Master" and our Lord replied "Why do you call me good? Only God is good". Jesus stressed the word "me" because doubtless He wanted to draw the man's attention to what was actually happening in his environment - the Son of God was present according to the promises of the Old Testament. God Himself had become man; the eternal Father was with us, as Isaiah had foretold. This fact made the world take on quite a different aspect. God was in the world bringing about His purposes. This made the possessions of wealth and comfort and power of a good deal less importance; once this fact was realised and so Jesus directed the young man's thoughts to this question first, "Why do you call me good? " Our Lord's final advice to him was simple: "Follow me". But this would involve, as it did for the apostles, abandoning his worldly prospects. Jesus said "Go and sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven". Notice the practicality of our Lord's advice. There was no high-fallutin sentimentality or impractical idealism. The young man would lose nothing, because Jesus added "You will have treasure in heaven". The young man had come with the question how could he enter the kingdom of heaven? Since he believed in
heaven, he was told to transfer his 'assets there as the first step. God would not be in his debt. "You shall have treasure in heaven" Jesus said. Then Jesus came to the main point: "Come and follow me. Keep my company. That is the way to eternal life." The young man could not bring himself to do this, much as he would have liked to from one point of view. He went away sorrowful, back to his property, back to his comfort, back to his status back to his worldly prospects. The present, which in his case meant comfort, power, prestige, was too attractive. The other, too dim to his faith. It was at this juncture as the man walked away that Peter asked his question, "Look", he said to Jesus, "We have left everything, what is there in it for us?" Who was fool? The young man going back or the young men sticking with Jesus? In His reply Jesus was outspoken and explicit. He said straight out that when God's purposes were completed, in the regeneration of the world, the apostles would have their reward: They would sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel - all the prestige one could want. But, of course, when the time really comes we won't want that kind of prestige, but Jesus spoke in language that Peter could understand. In brief, Jesus reminded Peter of the truths of the Gospel which is quite simply that God's kingdom will certainly come. It is the pearl that is worth everything else. It had indeed already come in the person of Jesus. But there is still a future completion when God's rule will be made plain. There will be a regeneration of the world when wrong will be set right and sin and evil judged, punished and banished; there will be a judgement when the wheat will be separated from the chaff, and this was already in process with the presence of Jesus. God had come into the world and was grappling with and defeating evil. The call of the Gospel is to believe these things, to believe about Jesus that He is Lord, and His Word to be trusted and obeyed. There is plenty of evidence to support our faith. The rich young ruler had the evidence of Jesus' life and miracles: the sick healed, the dead raised, evil spirits expelled, a perfect teacher. We have these and more, especially the resurrection and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and when we are tempted to look back and to ask the question, "What is there in it for us?" we are to take our eyes off the temporary, the world and its affluence, and to see the eternal and to live by that; to make Jesus the centre of our lives as He is the centre of the world, because He is God.
manifest in the flesh; not an isolated event but the proof that the Kingdom of God will be the most real thing in our experience. The rich young ruler turned back to his money and his comfort and his prestige and his power. They only lasted for another 50 years at the most; what will he think about it in the day of the regeneration?

Jesus concluded His answer to Peter by widening it to include everyone who has left anything for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the Gospel. "There is no-one", He said "who has left his house, or his brothers, or sisters or parents or property for my sake and for the gospel which will not receive one hundredfold now in this present life and in the age to come everlasting life". Notice the down-to-earthness of this reply. There is no call for asceticism and the giving up of things for its own sake. Jesus has said that we will receive in this life more than we have given up in the very form of the things given up: houses, brothers, sisters, parents, children, fields. God has made this world to be enjoyed and He intends us to enjoy life day by day as it comes along. We are to enjoy God's world, and to thank Him for it and for the joys He gives us in it but without setting our hearts on it, so that we will not refuse if the call to follow Jesus as Lord involves us in losing these things for our eyes are not to be fixed on the things of this world, but on the kingdom of God and its rewards. For Jesus added that those who followed Him may also expect persecutions. This is because we live in a world dominated by evil. You must expect persecution if you are going to seek first God's kingdom and live by the scale of values that this involves, for you will be out of step with the rest; with those who value first worldly affluence, prestige and power. But nevertheless if we follow Christ we have the promise that in this world God gives us richly all things to enjoy but with persecutions, as was the experience of all the apostles. Yet God's care for us and our fellowship with Him never fails, so that in the coming age when God's kingdom will reach its culmination, we will inherit eternal life, the fulness of fellowship with God.

The Gospel is simply a statement of the facts of the case, namely that the kingdom of God is at hand; and the call of the Gospel is to repent and believe it; that is to say, it is a call to change our attitude to life, and our values; to base them on the truth of the Gospel, that Jesus Christ is Lord.
What we modern Christians need and what the church today needs is a revivification and renewed adoption of the world view that the Gospel puts before us. We need to preach the Gospel, the facts of reality, we need to repent, that is, change our minds and believe the Gospel. Otherwise, when the question obtrudes itself in our minds are we making fools of ourselves in giving up the obvious advantages of the present, and perhaps suffering persecution as Christians--and what is there in it for us--when we ask this question, Unless we have a firm grip of the Gospel, we will find ourselves in actual fact giving the answer that the young ruler gave. But those twelve thrones are real. The judgement day is true. Reality is God. And the Gospel is, as St. Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17 "God commends men that they should all everywhere change their minds about Him, in as much as He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man which He has ordained, whereof He has given assurance to everyone in that He has raised Him from the dead". (Acts 17:30,31).

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