

Assurance of Faith – 24 October 2010

Joel 2:23-32; Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:15-30

The readings today had me pondering on a question: ‘how do we know that we know something?’

It’s easy to know what our senses tell us. I know you are sitting there because I can see and hear you. If I came closer I could perhaps smell and touch you. I promise not to taste you!

When it comes to less obvious matters we can know there is something like air, even though we can’t see it – it is invisible – we can feel it or hear it occasionally.

How do we know we love someone? That’s a different knowing. Yet although we can’t see love as such, love is a feeling and we know it is there.

Paul in his letter to Timothy knows some things clearly.

He knows he has eternal life. He can’t see it but he knows it. He knows he has finished his race – his particular race on earth and he knows it is important to finish the race and not pull out before the end.

The rich ruler didn’t know how to get eternal life or did he? Was his question rhetorical because he thought he was doing all the right things to get there?

Did you notice that this man, with all the advantages in life, expected Jesus to know the answer? He knows Jesus would know and his question gives the impression that this is a burning issue for him.

Is it for us?

Are we asking the question about eternal life?

And are we in the same place where Paul was – totally assured of eternal life?

Many years ago when I was a motor bike riding, fun loving, party going university student I didn’t believe in God and I certainly wasn’t interested in thinking about eternal life. I was living, as many do, in the here and now.

I met a handsome, amazing young man who was rock mad and we married.

6 months later Peter was nearly killed in a vehicle incident with black ice on a windy West Coast Tasmanian road travelling for work and we faced rather soberly that he nearly died. It rather shook us up.

A number of months later that same year we were living in a bush camp in the NT, living under canvas, and became surrounded by bush fires. Fully encircled, beating the flames with wet hessian bags we stopped it at the very edge of our camp. At the time we were fighting for our lives, as you do in a bush fire, although it wasn't anywhere as severe as the Victorian ones.

Then a few months later, in the same year we were back in town, Darwin, on Christmas Eve when Cyclone Tracey came through. We were where the eye came right over – the worst hit part of Darwin. And we thought we might die for a large part of that night.

When you face death up close, whether young or old, it has you begin to think about the bigger picture questions about life and life after this life, and whether you believe in it or not.

12 months after the cyclone I had surgery and as I came out of the general anaesthetic I found myself thinking about the question of eternal life. I asked it differently but I was asking it very deeply. I kept thinking “what would have happened to me if I had died while in the operating theatre?”

A natural question after facing death in a variety of ways over the previous year or so.

And I knew inside I wanted to repent and get myself right with God. The funny thing was I still was struggling to believe in God but I knew inside that this was the first step.

How did I know that?

Presumably from having had a church upbringing – it is so important that all children get to hear about Jesus – that we let the little ones come to Him, for it creates an inner knowing of the way back to Him when they so choose.

Well after the surgery we went on a trip to NZ and as we travelled we kept meeting up with committed Christians. I think God set this up!

One young couple, in particular, had something that we really wanted – they had very little materially but they had an incredible **JOY**.

And we asked the question the rich young ruler asked: what do we have to do to have eternal life? Only we asked it differently – we asked how do we get what you have?

They told us the answer was simple:

- To believe in Jesus as the Son of God;
- To say sorry for our sins;
- And to invite Jesus to come and live in us forever.

We did that later on in the trip – on a lush green hill on the South Island. There were no bells and whistles but somehow we knew we had done something really important, really really, important. And we learnt later to live in a righteous way – just as Jesus tells the rich ruler.

Over the years I came to know, like Paul, the assurance of eternal life. How?

Firstly by choosing to believe what God says about it in His Word.

By reading the Bible and letting its truths soak into me. By being in a Bible study group and having the fellowship and friendship that develops there in a very special way and having through that people to pray with about anything. I listened to teaching of what Jesus achieved on the Cross. That He did everything necessary for me to have eternal life. I just had to say 'yes please!' 'I'll have it.' And choose to follow Jesus ie become His disciple. That part is not too hard when I belonged to a church, and a small group and when I learnt that the Holy Spirit had been given to me to help me live increasingly like Jesus.

If we find it hard to read the Bible we only have to ask the Holy Spirit to help us and to reveal the wonderful truths in it. The Holy Spirit partners with us to reveal God's promises to us, including those to do with eternal life.

Did you notice in the first reading the promise in Joel that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved?

Everyone – not just some – not the really religious ones – everyone who calls on the Lord's name will be saved.

Knowing that promise at a deep level gives assurance.

Did you notice in Psalm 65 the praising at what God does and will do? He hears our prayers, He forgives our sins. The writer of the psalm knew this. No wonder the hills are clothed with gladness and the fields and valleys shout for joy and sing.

Another answer to the question in the Gospel, 'what must I do to receive eternal life?' is actually revealed just before it is asked in the scene between Jesus and the little children. The answer is simple: receive it like a child.

There is no need to complicate it.

So to sum the main points up so far in looking at the rich ruler's question about how do we get eternal life:

- Turn to Jesus, call upon His name, repent of sins and follow Him.
- Receive the gift of eternal life the way a child receives a gift, and then

- Live in the assurance of it. For we can all have the same assurance Paul had. Verse 18 in 2 Tim 4: *‘the Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom’*. Also in verses 6-8 Paul says he has finished the race and kept the faith and continues to say: *“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”*

How can Paul know this so surely?

Because it is a done deal!

Jesus did it for us and we feely receive it by choice – our free choice. I would never want to minimise what Jesus did on the Cross, by doubting its effectiveness, its completeness. Doubting what was achieved by the cross is dishonouring and I would never want to dishonour His sacrifice for me.

We have many promises about it and if we are having trouble believing them – learn them off by heart and repeat them until they are in our innermost beings. For God’s Word is truth. Let the truth penetrate.

And finally – the last point – **REJOICE**.

This is an amazing gift – to have eternal life. You see even the rich ruler knew he couldn’t buy it.

We have such a reason to rejoice – as does all of creation.

- Rejoicing is the natural response.
- Rejoicing is a demonstration of our assurance.
- The more we rejoice in it the deeper we know it inside. It is like it digs it deeper and deeper.

I was drawn to that young penniless couple in NZ because their life exuded joy and rejoicing. They radiated the joy of the Lord because they knew Jesus and what He had done for them.

I started this sermon with a question: ‘how do we know some things?’

I finish it with a question for all of us – **“how would others know, when they meet us, that we have the assurance of eternal life?”**

Let us pray:

Prayer for conviction of the truth of the assurance of our faith.