

Whoever Has the Son Has Life

Sermon January 17, 2021

Golden Verse: *Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:12)*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 90:1-12 and John 1:43-51

How would we define LIFE?

What is the opposite of LIFE? DEATH!

Most individuals and most churches are facing BIG obstacles. Much of the time, it is easier for us to look at negative issues such as bad weather, natural disasters, accidents, undesirable behaviours, sickness, and death. If it is church related, we tend to talk about negativity such as aging and shrinking congregations, and unsatisfied people leaving the congregations. And, maybe you can relate to this.

In the last 6 months, in our presbytery, two Presbyterian churches went into serious difficulties. Both congregations are larger than ours. One congregation reached the point of having to close their doors. The second one was not able to support their expenses, and they are going through serious spiritual and financial struggles.

So many Presbyterian churches and members lost hope in the Presbyterian Church. Some of our Calvin family members or friends have different feelings and create quite different thoughts about our church. For some people at Calvin, the teaching is “too Biblical”. For some people, not evangelical enough. Some people think negatively about our leadership because, based on our Saviour’s teaching of “Love one another as I loved you”, we embrace and love everybody, and welcome everybody to Calvin. Some are expecting us to be more exclusive. Some said that they would like us to provide better support and be more inclusive.

Maybe you would say that it is impossible to please everybody and to make everybody happy. But church life cannot be about pleasing the members. Our Lord Jesus Christ’s goal was not to please people, but to raise their spiritual life from death to life.

The church is Christ’s body, where each and every person is responsible for his or her actions, thoughts and confessions. Each and every person is personally responsible for their own faith and their own actions, as Christians and as part of their church family.

In our Scripture reading, our Lord Jesus was inviting strangers to change their whole lifestyle and to follow Him. He wanted to switch their way of thinking, their direction, and their actions.

This is how I should explain Jesus' goal in a psychological way. Expressing it theologically, I would say: Jesus Christ wanted to switch their direction from DEATH towards LIFE. His goal with these people, who became His disciples, was to earn LIFE and to share LIFE.

May the Holy Spirit help us today to see more clearly our call and our responsibilities as we are listening to God's message.

Let us put together these two words: ALIVE and DEAD.

The Bible never says that, if we are Church members, we are ALIVE. However, the Bible says that if you and I have Jesus Christ in the centre of our lives, we are ALIVE; if a person is missing Jesus, the person spiritually is DEAD.

If we call ourselves only "religious", and if we are attending the church services because this is what we did for decades, and if we are having communion just because it is our tradition to do so, we are still DEAD. Only that person is called ALIVE who has Jesus in the middle of her or his life.

I would like to share with you a story. About six years ago a person provided a drive to another person, who needed help and pastoral support. The driver was driving for almost two hours to my home office, searching for help and support for her friend. I invited the driver to take a seat in the family room where she could watch TV while she waited. The driver said she had her Bible with her and a book, and those are her best company. She would read and meditate and pray while she waited. She was deeply committed to Christ and as a newborn Christian.

The other person who came for pastoral counselling was crying very often during the entire conversation and I was moved by her story.

She was dealing with anger issues. She always wanted to dominate. If things did not go like she wanted, she lost her control, and her behaviour was totally unacceptable and no more tolerated by her family and friends. She was ashamed of who she became during the years and she wanted to change before she lost her husband and her children. She wanted to change many times, but she did not have the strength and only made promises. But very soon, she realized, those promises were only empty promises, based on her heart's desire.

Our Lord Jesus Christ talks to us about this human behaviour when he says: "*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*" Matthew 26:41. She also confessed that, as she was, she was a spiritually DEAD person. In 1 John 5:12 we read: "*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life*" which means that person from God's perspective is DEAD.

I told her that the key moment in our lives is when we recognize that we don't have enough strength to change our hearts and our behaviour. For this, we offer our lives to God who created heaven and earth, and who is able to re-create us. We have to go to the Lord Jesus, who has all authority on heaven and earth, and we have to ask Him to cleanse us, to move into the middle of our hearts, to control our feelings and our actions, and to guide us. We have to ask Christ to rule our feelings, our temper and our behaviour.

In order to help this deeply wounded and sad person to make the most important change in her life, I gave her a practical example. In our lives, we have a huge chair and we are sitting in it. Everything goes according to our will. But when we invite Jesus Christ into our lives, we have to give him the main chair and we have to sit on the much smaller one. We have to let Jesus guide us and we have to make a commitment that we will not kick him out from that chair anymore but we will let him be our Lord.

I told her that the Lord Jesus Christ can help her to make major changes and can fulfill her desire, and Jesus IS able to help her to live a new life. I told her she does not have to continue her life being so miserable with her husband and her children. Jesus is able to change her horrible temper which likes to argue with everybody. Jesus is able to change her bad self-esteem and can transform her into a nice, kind, loving person.

Close to the end of our session, I asked that person if she would like to invite the Lord into her heart. She said she has a desire to have Christ close to her. But then she understood that having Jesus close to her, Jesus will be still **outside** of her. She understood that she has to offer the main chair to Jesus.

Then we bowed our knees and heads in prayer. It was the first time that this person went on her knees to pray. With broken words, she invited Jesus INTO her life. After she prayed, she stood up and she had a big smile on her face. She said "When I prayed, I felt that Jesus touched me in a very gentle way, and now I am not alone anymore".

Two days ago, she called me to tell me that every day she goes on her knees in prayer for a few times and she knows that she has power for all good things in the name of Jesus, who lives in her heart.

God wants to send you out as a gift to those who live around you or work with you, to tell them that we have a Loving God, who is visiting us in His son Jesus Christ.

I would like to share with you another story which really touched my heart. It is the "Story of a Son". The author of this story is unknown.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art.

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier.

The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands.

He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art.

The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears.

He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. "Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection. On the platform sat the painting of the son.

The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."

But the auctioneer persisted, "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?"

Another voice shouted angrily, "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!" But still the auctioneer continued, "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?"

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10, who will bid \$20?" "Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters." "\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?" The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!"

A man sitting in the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!" The auctioneer laid down his gavel, "I'm sorry, the auction is over."

"What about the paintings?"

"I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

God gave his Son 2,000 years ago to die on a cruel cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is, "The Son, the Son, who'll take the Son?" Because you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything.