

“Where Will You Spend Eternity?”  
Romans 2:6-10

One of the privileges of being a pastor is conducting the funeral or memorial service of a believer in Jesus Christ. I don't always say it in the service for a Christian, but the words of Psalm 115:16 are always on my mind: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” How can death be “precious”? It's precious because that believer, that saint has left this earth and has gone to be with the Lord in glory! Those services are a great opportunity to share the hope, the future that is found only in Jesus Christ! Having said that, one of the hardest things about being a pastor is doing the service of someone who gave no evidence that Jesus was their personal Savior and Lord. About that person there is no encouragement, no hope I can offer.

Our passage today addresses eternity and where you will spend it. When life is over on this earth, God will give to everyone either eternal life or eternal wrath and punishment. Simply put, heaven or hell awaits you when you die. And both will last forever. Please don't miss this. What could be more important or more relevant or more urgent than your happiness or misery for all eternity? Children, this is very important for you. Someday you are going to die. I hope it will be when you are very old and have lived many years. But you might be much younger when you die. And when you die, you will either enter eternal life with God or go away under His eternal anger and misery forever. You don't have to be afraid about this! God has given His Son Jesus to die for sinners so that everyone who trusts in Him will not go to hell, but have eternal life (John 3:16). One of the hardest deaths I was a part of was the death of a five-year-old girl. But I've never forgotten what she said to me in the last week of her life: “I love Jesus and I want to go to heaven and be with Him.” Megan was not afraid to die. Junior and senior highers: so much of your life right now is about promise and preparation. The promise of your future and all you're doing to prepare for it: in academics, in vocation, in relationships. What often gets crowded out is spiritual preparation. Don't assume you'll live a long time and be able to deal with heaven and hell when you're old. Every day there's news of young people dying suddenly and unexpectedly. For the rest of us: Your life here is preparation, preparation for eternity. One definition of a fool is that he's someone who doesn't prepare for what he knows is coming. You're wise to prepare for what you know is coming when your life here on earth is done. Our passage says there are two roads you can follow into eternity.

One is the road of the person who does good. Verses seven and ten say, “To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He (God) will give eternal life...There will be glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” God gives to those who do good the eternal life that is glory, honor, and peace. That's our text's description of heaven. Elsewhere we know that heaven is the place where “We will be with the Lord forever” (I Thessalonians 4:17), where “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4). It's the place where “You will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (I Peter 5:4). That's the road of the person who does good.

The second road, the road of the person who does what is evil, is addressed in verses eight and nine: “For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” The road to hell is simply defined as the spirit of hatred, of antagonism against God and His Son. The unsaved person is by nature selfish, selfishly ambitious, and his hostility against God leads him to reject God and His truth and follow evil. On such people God will pour out His wrath and anger. Those who reject Him will experience “trouble and distress,” words used frequently in the Bible to describe the suffering of the wicked in the life to come (Isaiah 8:22; Zephaniah 1:15, 17). Other descriptions of hell include II Thessalonians 1:9: “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the

presence of the Lord.” Jesus spoke of those “who are cursed,” who will be cast “into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

Many people find this section of Romans extremely difficult for a couple of reasons. First, it unambiguously states that there is only one of two roads into eternity, and one of them is not nice. Second, this passage is hard because it seems to be saying that where you spend eternity is based on your works, what you do. If you do good works, you will be saved. If you do evil works, you will be lost and damned. Romans 2 isn't the only place we read this. Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Even Jesus said, “For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27; also John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:12-13).

Question: Does this mean that you are saved by your works? That where you spend eternity is based on what you do? As you look across the whole spectrum of God's truth, you know our passage is not saying this. God has never promised eternal life on the basis of our good works. No one is saved other than by the work of Jesus Christ and by faith in Him. As Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Eternal life is always based on Jesus Christ and through our faith. But if salvation is wholly by faith, then how do works enter the picture? And it's obvious they are important. Paul answers that question as he continues his great statement in Ephesians 2 with these words: “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). The tie between saving faith and works is this: the person whose life is saved by faith gives evidence of that salvation by doing God's work, by obeying Him, by doing good. Outward, visible God-honoring acts are the evidence, the proof of inward, saving faith. Here's an important point: the gospel does not come into your life, save you, and then leave you under the power of selfishness, under the control of sin. The good news of God is not weak, it's not feeble. It's power, “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” By that power there will be a way of life that God can put on display to demonstrate to the world that your faith is real, that you are on the road to eternal life. Another way to put it is that God gives eternal life to those who do good not because what they do earns them salvation and eternal life, but because saving faith always changes lives in the power of God so that true believers will always pursue, always persevere in doing good.

I have three conclusions today. One, in light of the fact that the short years of life here are preparation for a life that will last forever, do you really believe that those without Christ will spend eternity in the torment, tribulation, and distress that is hell? It's charged that if Bible-believing Christians really believed what God's Word says about hell, we'd never hesitate to share with unbelievers the good news of Jesus Christ. Do you really believe in hell? Two, if you claim to be a Christian, do your life, your words and actions give convincing proof to other people that you're a believer in Jesus Christ? That the power of God that saves is alive and active and working in your life? Are you actively involved in doing good in your home, your school, your church, your community? Three, at this Table, we celebrate and rejoice in the salvation that is ours in our Savior and Lord. We celebrate the future that awaits us in eternity – no pain, no tears, no suffering; just joy and peace and love and glory! And we come to this Table to receive a specific ministry of the Spirit of Jesus Christ: a ministry that touches and transforms and encourages our inner being. That from “in here” will flow a life (words and actions, deeds and works) that prove and declare to the world there is a God who saves, saves in His Son Jesus, our Savior and Lord!