

*December 8, 2019*  
*Sunday Morning Service*  
*Series: Luke*  
*Community Baptist Church*  
*643 S. Suber Road*  
*Greer, SC 29650*  
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## **To Ponder . . .**

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 18:18-34.

1. Why is it impossible for a rich person, or any person, to do enough to get into heaven?
2. How is Jesus' promise that He had to go to Jerusalem to die connected with His promise that with God all things are possible?
3. Why did you hear the gospel, and why did you respond positively to it?
4. If salvation is of God alone, why did Jesus send out the disciples to preach the gospel everywhere and to all people?
5. Name some positive traits about the rich, young ruler.
6. Why did Jesus let this very promising young man walk away?

### **ONLY GOD CAN DO THE IMPOSSIBLE** **Luke 18:18-34**

Throughout our study of Luke's story about the Good News, and especially in chapters seventeen and eighteen, we have heard over and over that no amount of good works can open the door to the kingdom of heaven. This is such a difficult issue for people to grasp. The preponderance of religions that teach salvation through good

works prove that it is a natural response for humans to believe, or at least hope, that they can earn their way into heaven.

So pervasive is this heresy that many sects or brands of religion that we associate with freely also resist the idea that salvation is of the Lord, and only of the Lord. It is possible that I have been the pastor of several people over the years who, deep down, believe that if they simply obey God and try to keep His Law, He will in the last day concede to let them into heaven.

Chapter eighteen flows out of chapter seventeen where we read how Jesus healed ten lepers. Nine of those lepers had faith in the rituals required by Mosaic Law. One of them had faith in Jesus and returned to thank Him. Jesus declared that the man's faith saved him (17:11-19). Jesus taught that the only people who will get into the actual kingdom of God are those who first enter the spiritual kingdom where He reigns as king in His peoples' hearts (17:20-37).

Our text flows out of the conversation recorded in the first half of chapter eighteen where we studied the story last week of the Pharisee and tax collector who prayed at the temple. The Pharisee bragged about all the good works he accomplished, even going beyond what God's Law required in fasting and giving tithes. The tax collector, on the other hand, offered no list of good works but only begged God for mercy. Jesus affirmed that the sinner who asked for mercy was declared righteous and the sinner who bragged about his many works was left in the cesspool of his self-righteousness.

The last verses of the previous chapter contained an illustration of the great need. Jesus taught that only people who are fully dependent on God's grace, like little children who must have faith and dependance toward their care givers, will enter heaven.

It appears that one man standing in the audience heard all that Jesus had taught and came under conviction. It appears that this man sincerely desired to know how to get into heaven, contrasted with the Pharisees who asked questions to put Jesus to the test (Luke 17:20, Matthew 16:1). Jesus' response and subsequent teaching gives us critical teaching about salvation. Salvation is a miracle. Only God can give the miracle of salvation. Trusting God to grant that miracle requires great faith and dependance on God alone.

## Divine Evangelism. (vv.18-27)

Sinners need to know what to do (vv.18-22). That was the concern for the ruler who wanted to know about eternal life. *And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v.18).* In light of the man’s desire for eternal life and his claim to have obeyed the law, we can conclude that he was a religious ruler of some kind. Maybe he was a synagogue ruler.

In admitting his need for eternal life, the man demonstrated a far better understanding of spiritual truth than the Pharisees who were quite sure they were already in the kingdom. His desire is attested to by all the synoptic gospels which include the story with little variation. Mark described the man’s intense desire for eternal life by writing, *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).* He was so concerned about eternal life that he showed no embarrassment for a display of deep emotion. He had no concern for what his peers or the Pharisees would think of him, a ruler and significant man, running and bowing down before Jesus the Galilean preacher.

The man came to the right Teacher asking the right question. We would consider this person to be a prime candidate for evangelism. This man would be the topic of our discussion at a disciple-making meeting.

The Good Teacher’s reply to the man’s question was expected and yet surprising. On one hand, the fellow was probably surprised by Jesus’ rebuke. *And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (v.19).* Mark recorded the same words and Matthew’s account was a bit different. *And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good” (Matthew 19:17).*

In this surprising response, Jesus did not refute the man’s claim that He was indeed good. Rather, Jesus emphasized the very important truth that the man might not have fully understood. It was the same truth the Pharisees purposely rejected. The truth is that Jesus, the Teacher, was good because He was God! Who better to explain entrance into eternal life than the Author of eternal life?

The expected part of Jesus’ response was simply a rehearsal of some commands from the Mosaic Law. *“You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother’” (v.20).* Jesus gave the man five commands from the second half of the Big Ten. You will remember that the first four of the Ten Commandments deal with our relationship with God. The second six commands deal with our relationship with other people. It is quite interesting that Jesus did not mention the last command of the ten, *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s” (Exodus 20:17).* We will consider a possible reason why Jesus left that command out in a moment.

By quoting these commands that deal with interpersonal relationships, Jesus met the man where he was. Right away Jesus appealed to the law, because this man was all about “doing” (“What must I do?”). His question put him in the category of the praying Pharisee not the category of the repentant sinner tax collector.

In response to Jesus’ statement of five commands, the young fellow concluded that it was no problem because he did all that stuff. *And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth” (v.21).* That is a very interesting reply, because if the man had been keeping all the laws, why did he doubt he had eternal life? Something in his conscience was telling him that he wasn’t quite in the kingdom yet.

The conscience is a wonderful sounding board for Holy Spirit conviction. Our consciences respond to the requirements of the law. At that point, we acknowledge that we have not kept God’s Law. Or we try to push the conviction away, concluding that it doesn’t matter if we keep God’s Law. Or we try to convince ourselves that we are doing okay in the matter of Law-keeping.

Therefore, the young ruler’s answer to Jesus’ challenge to keep the Law reveals either ignorance, self-deception, or blinding self-righteousness. No one keeps the whole law – or even the entirety of the second table of the law – all the time. At the very least this answer proved the ruler did not know God’s character, or did not know God’s Law (which reveals God’s character), or he did know himself.

And just when the man thought he must be half way through the door of the kingdom, Jesus posed one more rule for the man to keep. *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me"* (v.22). By this challenge, Jesus did not teach that a sinner can buy his way into heaven. He already debunked that error in the previous discussion with the Pharisees.

Rather, these words lay down the ultimate cost for entering the kingdom of heaven, for gaining eternal life. No doubt the ruler sincerely wanted eternal life. But how deep was his sincerity? How deep is your desire for eternal life? There was one thing in the ruler's life that he wanted more than eternal life – the pleasures of this life that money can buy. Love of money (covetousness) was the man's god. Is that why Jesus withheld the command about covetousness when He listed the five? The last command and the first command support each other. The man's god was money and, therefore, he was guilty of breaking the first command, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). So rather than telling the young man to "do something," Jesus told him to "undo something." The challenge here was for the man to be willing to sacrifice what was most important to him on earth in order for His Creator to be most important to him.

Jesus' requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven will be similar for us and can affect almost any area of life. Earlier in Luke's Gospel, Jesus established that the requirement for eternal life is, *And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it"* (Luke 9:23-24). Complete dependance on Christ means no dependance on anything or anyone else for salvation. Nothing can be more important to you than Christ when He is your Savior from sin.

The young, rich man demonstrated the sad reality that sinners have no power to do what they need to do (vv.23-27). Having had his false god revealed to him, the sinner walked away. *But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, looking at him with sadness (vv.23-24a).* Notice the two extremes stated in this verse. The man was **very** sad and the man was

**extremely** rich. But at the judgment seat of Christ, the man will be infinitely sadder and extremely poor in every aspect.

The Savior is also sad when sinners cannot release their treasured sins in order to embrace Him. Matthew added that the man went away sorrowful (Matthew 19:22) . . . and Jesus let him walk. Would you ask the very interested man who was ready to be saved to come back so that you can explain the good news better? Would you try to negotiate a less costly price for entering the kingdom of heaven? Evangelism is telling the Good News of salvation, which includes the cost. Salvation is the response to the Good News, which is not of human origin. In other words, tell the Good News, make it plain, and leave the results with God.

Why? Because salvation is possible for God alone (vv.24b-27). For the sake of the disciples, Jesus illustrated the difficulty, yeah, the impossibility of anyone gaining salvation through their works, standing, or possessions. *"How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God"* (vv.24b-25).

There is no need to do syntactic gymnastics to make this illustration palatable. The illustration is fine as Jesus stated it. He intended to illustrate that rich people can no more enter heaven by their own works than a literal camel can go through the eye of a literal needle. Rich people cannot get into heaven on their own. It can't happen. In all reality, neither can we abandon all to follow Christ through human strength alone. We are incapable of making that much sacrifice.

Give up what is important to you and something will take its place. Our hearts are idol factories. Destroy one idol and the heart will build another one to replace it. Or as Calvin described our nature: "The human mind, stuffed as it is with presumptuous rashness, dares to imagine a god suited to its own capacity; as it labours under dullness, nay, is sunk in the grossest ignorance, it substitutes vanity and an empty phantom in the place of God. To these evils another is added. The god whom man has thus conceived inwardly he attempts to embody outwardly. The mind, in this way, conceives the idol, and the hand gives it birth." (*Institutes*)

The rich, young ruler was typical of many, yeah most, religious people throughout history. They want Christ – plus. Christ plus anything equals nothing. You cannot add anything to Christ’s finished work of redemption. How then can a sinner be saved? That is the expected question. *Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” (v.26).* That is what we all should think. If it is humanly impossible to give up all that is necessary in order to follow Christ, how can we be saved?

To that question, Jesus gives an unexpected response. *But he said, “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (v.27).* This is the whole point of the story. The rich, young ruler demonstrated how impossible it is for anyone to do enough to be saved from sin. Only God can cleanse us, redeem us, and put us in Christ.

### **Human Misunderstanding. (vv.28-30)**

Having watched the preceding scenario, Peter fell into the very common trap of comparison. It was the “We” are better than “They” are fallacy (v.28). It was a statement about sacrifice. *And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you” (v.28).* Peter’s response should almost shock us. Instead of thinking about God doing the impossible in saving us, Peter was thinking about what he and the other disciples had sacrificed. No doubt they sacrificed much, but . . . !

It gets worse when we read Matthew’s account. *Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (Matthew 19:27).* How could Peter be thinking about earthly stuff at a time of such serious eternal discussion? But in truth, don’t we all think this way? Have you ever compared your sacrifice to follow Christ with the failure of sinners to sacrifice anything?

The implication is about kingdom entrance. Remember what Jesus said when the man walked away. *“How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (vv.24-25).* The issue at hand was eternal life. And Peter was fixated on passing stuff. How spiritually immature he was. And us too.

Part of Peter’s confusion was rooted in his misunderstanding of the kingdom. Jesus was talking about the spiritual kingdom, which is the eternal state of being with God. Peter was thinking about an actual earthly kingdom. Would he and the disciples have rewards in an earthly kingdom? And we respond, “What an awfully worldly question!”

Yes, but maybe not. Jesus assured His servants that God knows all about any sacrifice we have made, and God is faithful to reward (vv.29-30). *And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”*

It is true that God gives rewards to His servants even in this life. Sometimes those rewards are actual, material blessings (stuff). Always the Lord’s rewards are spiritual blessings, like love, joy, peace, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control that bring far greater satisfaction than material possessions.

These spiritual blessings also include a different family according to Jesus’ promise. That new family is more valuable to us than stuff. When we follow Christ and His kingdom, God places us in His own family, real people with whom we have more in common than our own actual families. This is a reward and blessing from God. This is why I am so deeply concerned for professing Christians who show little concern for the church family in which God has placed them. Do you not see us as a blessing from God, a reward? Are we a nuisance to you, a necessary bother that you don’t feel compelled to meet with us to encourage us? When the passing stuff, experiences, and relationships of this sinful world are more important to you than we are, it gives just cause to wonder if God has actually blessed you with spiritual family. Which is to doubt that you are actually giving up anything to pursue the kingdom of heaven.

But rewards on earth are only the beginning of how God cares for us. God gives the ultimate reward in the future. Jesus promised rewards in this life, *and in the age to come eternal life (v.30).* Evidences of supernatural, divinely given blessings in this life are extremely important because they are an indication of your future state. If you do not have the spiritual blessings of love, joy, peace,

goodness, and such, it is likely an indication that you do not have the future blessing of eternal life waiting for you.

This is because we are experiencing eternal life right now. Where is the evidence of it in your life? Rest assured that the moment a person steps out of passing life into the eternal state, eternal life will be far and away the most important issue ever imaginable.

### **Promise of the “Impossible.” (vv.31-34)**

Eternal life is possible only through Divine sacrifice (vv.31-32). Jesus the man was on His way to be shamefully treated. *And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon (vv.31-32).*

These words remind us that Jesus understood His mission. He knew all along that He came to earth to pay the price to redeem God’s people from sin’s penalty. He understood the price He would have to pay. Jesus knew He must live perfectly according to the Mosaic Law. He knew He had to live sinlessly before God and man. He knew it meant He would be killed and shed His blood. He would have to be buried, and He would have to rise again.

Jesus explained His mission to His followers on multiple occasions. The first time was at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:21) almost a year previous to this event. Now Jesus was just weeks away from the fulfillment of His mission. He was leading the disciples to Jerusalem for this purpose.

It had to be this way because Jesus was God who had to rise from the dead. God is God and Jesus is God. Go back to the opening words of our text. *And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (vv.18-19).* Jesus responded in this odd way in order to help the inquiring ruler understand who he was talking to. In this context, Jesus reminded the disciples (who would preach the Good News) that He was God. Jesus pointed it out to everyone that God and only God can offer entrance into the kingdom of heaven. And to do that, God Himself would have to pay the price for sin.

Therefore, Jesus must rise from the dead after paying sin’s penalty with His life. *“And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise” (v.33).* It is the incredible truth about the Good News of salvation. Eternal life is impossible for us. Eternal life is God’s great possibility. But the followers didn’t get it. *But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said (v.34).*

The natural response for all sinners is, “They understand none of these things.” They cannot understand because “these sayings are hidden.” How can the sinner be saved and enter heaven? God does the impossible. He paid the price for sin. Sinners need to admit they are sinners and trust Jesus’ finished work of salvation alone. That confession is itself a miracle as God “unhides” these truths to the sinner.

When God the Holy Spirit draws you, the sinner, like He drew the young ruler, respond by begging God for mercy. In mercy, God will reveal the truth of your need of the Savior. In mercy, God will forgive your sins. In mercy, God will place you in Christ, so that you are able to deny self, abandon all lesser gods, and follow your Savior.