

“What must I do?”

February 21, 2021

Luke 18:15-30

I. Introduction

As the stories in today’s Scripture unfold, Passover was just weeks away. As they prepared for this celebration, many in Israel were thinking of the first Passover and Moses’ leading the children of Israel from slavery to freedom to God’s kingdom in the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. They were reminded that Moses had said in [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), “**The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.**” Every year they left an empty seat at the Seder meal—the Passover meal, for this coming prophet—their Messiah.

Having seen Jesus’ miracles and heard His teachings, many wondered if Jesus was this prophet; the Messiah who would once again lead the children of Israel from submission under foreign rule to a new and glorious kingdom of God. Maybe Jesus was this Warrior King the Pharisees had been teaching about. Back in [Luke 17:20-21](#) the Pharisees had asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. “**Jesus replied, ‘The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst.’**”

The question that was in many of the minds of those who listened to Jesus must have been, “*Who will be in this kingdom?*” “*To whom does this kingdom belong?*” Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector that we looked at a couple of weeks ago answered the question of who will not be in the kingdom. Surprisingly, it was those who were the most convinced that they would be part of God’s kingdom—the Pharisees and their followers. They had been deceived into believing that they would be saved through keeping God’s Law, doing good works, and observing rituals and ceremonies to the smallest detail. Contrary to their teachings, Jesus taught that those who did enter the kingdom were those who, like the tax collector, knew they couldn’t earn their salvation. Being aware of their sinfulness, they confessed their sins to God and cried to Him for forgiveness they don’t deserve. Jesus said that only such people will be justified by grace. In today’s Scripture Jesus continued teaching about the kingdom.

II. Be like Little Children

A. The Setting It began with some little children; even babies. Jewish parents commonly brought their children to the elders of the local synagogue or to prominent rabbis so that they might pronounce a blessing on them. So, it was reasonable that they would bring their little ones to Jesus: “**People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them.**” Mark’s account in **Mark 10:13** implies that there were also young children that were able to walk. There may have been a line or just a crowd of families with crying babies and squirming infants waiting to see Jesus.

B. The disciples’ response The disciples saw the children and their parents as unnecessary interruptions to the Lord’s ministry. They probably thought they were doing Jesus a favor by helping Him protect His time and conserve His strength. Teaching and miracles should preoccupy His time and attention, not the blessing of individual children to satisfy a mother’s whim. The disciples’ motive may have been right, but their actions were wrong. With angry voices the disciples rebuked the parents.

Despite living with Jesus for almost 3 years, and hearing Him teach and seeing Him perform miracles, they hadn’t caught His spirit. Jesus had already taught them to receive the children in His name and to be careful not to cause any of them to stumble—but in all the chaos, that was forgotten.

C. Jesus’ Response The disciples’ overzealous rebuke to the parents brought a critical response from Jesus. **Mark 10:14** says that Jesus was indignant with the disciples for the way they treated the parents and their children. Jesus didn’t rebuke the parents who brought their children to Him; it was the disciples who were the target of Jesus’ rebuke. His command, “**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them**” indicates that the disciples were to continue to allow the parents and their children to have access to Jesus.

As He was blessing the children, Jesus said that “**the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**” We often tell children to grow up and behave like adults, but Jesus was telling the adults that to become part of the kingdom of God, they needed to model themselves after the children. A little child humbly submits to the care of his parents and others who love him. He relies on them for all that he needs. He

knows he cannot meet his own needs and has no resources of his own. Children are often more open to God and less impacted by a culture that seeks to draw them away from considering God.

In Matthew 18:4 Jesus said, “Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” The only way to be part of the kingdom of God is to humble oneself and, like little children, admit that we are helpless, unable to save ourselves. We are totally dependent on the mercy and grace of God—turn to Ephesians 2:8-9. Like a little child, a sinner enters God’s kingdom by faith, believing that the heavenly Father loves him and will care for his or her daily needs. Isn’t that what we pray in the Lord’s Prayer?

III. The Rich Young Ruler

A. The Seeker’s Question Sometime later: “A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” Mark’s account in Mark 10:17 says, “As Jesus started on his way. A man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.” Matthew 19:16 adds that he was a young man; all three Gospels report that he was extremely wealthy. This rich, young ruler had a question. Despite all of his religious accomplishments, he knew he didn’t have eternal life. Recognizing this lack, he disregarded his reputation and dignity and came to Jesus humbly and in public. And he asked the right question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Eternal life is more than living forever—it is a quality of life which begins when a person accepts Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior. From that point on there is “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,” (Philippians 4:7); there is the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. This rich young ruler had none of these, so he came to the right person—Jesus Christ.

However, in the young man’s question, we see a shallow view of salvation, he thought he could do something to earn or merit eternal life—“What must I do?” And that view is still common today. Many unsaved people think that God will one day add up their good works and their bad works; and if their good works exceed their bad works, they will get into heaven. But Isaiah 64:6 says, “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Psalm 53:3 adds, “There is no one who does good, not even one.” That’s why

Jesus said in [John 14:6](#), “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

B. Jesus' Reply The young man called Jesus “[Good Master](#),” but that was just to flatter Him—Jewish rabbis did not even allow the word *good* to be applied to themselves. Only God is good, and the word was to be reserved for Him alone. Jesus wasn’t denying that He was God when He replied, “[No one is good—except God alone](#),” rather, He was affirming His identity. He just wanted to be sure that the young man really knew what he was saying and to whom he was speaking.

Jesus went on to challenge this man to judge himself by the Law. The Law is a mirror that shows us how dirty we really are, but it doesn’t make us clean--[Galatians 3:24](#) says, “[So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith](#).” With that in mind, Jesus gave a sample list of commandments—all 5 were from the Ten Commandments—all dealt with human relationships.

C. The young man’s response of “[All these I have kept since I was a boy](#),” showed that he didn’t see himself as a condemned sinner before the holy God. He had a superficial view of the Law of God; he measured obedience to God only by external actions and not by inward attitudes. Turn to [Romans 3:19-20](#). Jesus’ words in [Matthew 23:27](#) could have been addressed to him, “[Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean](#).”

D. Jesus’ Challenge Trying to show him that there was something missing in his heart, Jesus challenged him, “[You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me](#).”

“[When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth](#).” The young man lacked a real faith in the true God. Money was his god. He trusted it. He worshipped it. He got his fulfillment from it. His morality and good manners only concealed a covetous heart—another commandment. Earthly wealth and earthly satisfaction was this rich, young ruler’s god.

As a highly respected, revered, and honored religious leader, he viewed his prosperity and his exalted position in the synagogue as evidence that he was good, and that God was pleased with him. He

was unwilling to acknowledge that he was a sinner; he was unwilling to admit that his good works could not save him; he was unwilling to throw himself on God's grace and mercy and submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Sadly, at the crossroads of the narrow way to heaven and the broad way to destruction, i.e., to hell, he chose the broad way.

E. Jesus' teaching The disciples must have been surprised when the young man walked dejectedly away—he had been so close! They were also amazed at Jesus' words concerning the difficulty the rich find in entering the kingdom. They were Jews and the Jews believed that riches were a sign of God's blessing. *"If rich people can't be saved," they thought, "what hope is there for the rest of us?"*

It isn't possessing riches that keeps people out of heaven, Abraham, David, and Solomon were rich. It is being possessed by riches and trusting them that makes salvation difficult. Wealth gives people a false sense of success and security, and when people are satisfied with themselves, they feel no need for God. Turn to 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Wealth can draw the heart away from God, 1 Timothy 6:10 says, **"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."** The attraction of wealth is so strong and consuming that Jesus said, **"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Shocked by this statement, the disciples asked, **"Who then can be saved?"** Jesus answered, **"What is impossible with man is possible with God."** Sinners, by their own power, will, and effort, cannot save themselves (Jeremiah 13:23); only a sovereign act of God can save a person from hell. Turn to John 1:11-13. When one, by the work of the Spirit, reaches the point where he desires to repent and be saved, having acknowledged his guilt, he only has to cry out to God and ask Him to forgive his sins and save him from judgment through Jesus Christ. The Tax collector prayed, **"God, have mercy on me a sinner."** Salvation is a miracle of God's grace—it is always God's gift; what man cannot do God can.

Jesus went on to reassure His disciples that no one who follows Him will ever lose what is really important, either in this life or in the life to come. Turn to Luke 9:24-25. God will reward each one **"in this age and in the age to come, eternal life."** All believers become part of the church, the body of Christ.

While they may lose their earthly families when they become Christians, they find that they have gained a heavenly family and are given many fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers in Christ—people who lift them up in prayer and help in other tangible ways.

IV. Conclusion

The answer to the question, “*What must I do to be saved,*” as well as the essence of these two stories is summarized in one verse, [Romans 10:9](#), “*If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*” The rich, young ruler may have acknowledged that Jesus was both the Son of God and Lord of the universe when he addressed Him as “[Good teacher,](#)” and, in the beginning, appeared to be willing to do what Jesus told him to do in order to inherit eternal life. But, in the end, he was unwilling to acknowledge his sin and repent. He was unwilling to relinquish the riches which were his first love and then serve Jesus as Lord. He was unwilling to empty himself of his self-righteousness and his personal gods and confess that Jesus is his one and only Lord, the only one to be trusted for salvation and the only one to whom one must submit himself.

Finally, as [Romans 10:9](#) says, in humble, child-like faith, one must believe “[in your heart that God raised him from the dead.](#)” The truth of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was the supreme validation of Jesus’ sacrifice. [1 Corinthians 15:17](#) says, “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*” When God raised Jesus from the dead, the Father was declaring again that the Savior was His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased.

In our culture of increasing self-esteem and pride, many rebel against having to humble oneself before God or anyone else—but [James 4:10](#) says, “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*” [Romans 6:23](#) says, “*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” The Gospel message, our message is the same as Paul’s to the Philippian jailor in [Acts 16:31](#). “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*” And Peter told the Sanhedrin in [Acts 4:12](#), “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*” This is the message we must share with those around us as we “*Go and make disciples.*”

