

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 18:18-30

Parallel Passages: Mathew 19:16-30 and Mark 10:17-31

Sermon #78
May 17, 2020

The Price of Self-Deception

Last week's and today's passage in Luke have a close connection. Both are concerned with the Kingdom of God. On one hand we saw an infant used as an example of one who would enter the Kingdom of God by their childlike faith. To enter, according to Jesus, means one comes to Him in complete dependence and trust like infants trust their parents. Today the rich young ruler trusts in something other than God.

The last two previous passages we studied out of Luke 18 and today's passage make up a discipleship section that is interconnected. In each case, Jesus uses people to provide examples. The Pharisee and tax collector contrast pride and humility. The blessing of the little children shows God's openness to all who completely trust Jesus as opposed to those who considered themselves above others. The rich ruler shows how difficult it is for the rich to turn to God, while the disciples are the positive example of those who have given up everything in order to follow Jesus and serve the Kingdom of God. In each case, what is commanded is putting everything into the Father's care. Such simple, humble faith is believing what God desires for us and acting upon that belief.

This brings to the forefront questions we must ask ourselves. What changes must we make in our lives in order to entrust everything to the Father's care? What are the idols we must remove from our midst that we trust in - instead of Christ? As we contemplate these questions – let us commit our time to the Lord and ask for His enlightenment.

Pray

I wanted to start this week's sermon by thinking through what are idols in our lives because Jesus shows us in our text today what one man needed to give up or to let go of in order to enter the Kingdom of God. We will observe he had rival affections to God. He desired eternal life but his grip on this life was too great and he could not let go. He wanted the riches of this world and eternal life in the world to come. He wanted what wealth provided and to enjoy his fortune now and to be in control of his destiny and he wanted eternal life later on his own terms. The rich young ruler struggled with mankind's biggest battle, the sin of self-exaltation. From the beginning mankind, when left to themselves, people struggle with their desire to be like God. Satan knew this desire to be god-like was the deepest desire as he approached Adam and Eve about eating from the tree in the midst of the garden. **"The serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...'"** (Genesis 3:4-5) The fallen nature of mankind is to desire to be like God.

We seek to be like God as we seek to manipulate circumstances to our advantage in life. Only God can control the future but we try so very hard to do it ourselves. Rather than trusting God with childlike faith, we seek control and this leads to our desire for idols. We think we can be in control and can make those idols do what we want them to do when we want them to do it. For many their biggest idol is money. We work to acquire money and then pat ourselves on the back for a job well done. For most money equates to power, to having control. We choose to either spend it on things that we think will bring us happiness or amass it. The problem is people confuse happiness with material things as compared to peace and joy found in the Lord. The word happy or happiness is found only 3 times in the ESV, 13 in the NASB and 15 in the KJV. In all these cases the translators failed to express the Hebrew and Greek language well in their

translations for it would have been far better to use the word “**blessed**”. Happiness is a new truck, but in 6 months or a year or 3 years or later, it is old. Happiness is based on material things or events are fleeting and not permanent. Being blessed or having peace in God or joy in Christ are not fleeting. The other side of our problem with money is we save it then our bank accounts become what we trust rather than God. The more we have, the better we feel and the more we want. Money becomes like a drug that requires a bigger dosage each time to get the same high.

While we seek to exalt ourselves Jesus commands us to slay our sinful fallen nature and let the Holy Spirit rebuild us from the inside out into followers of Christ. Over and over in Luke’s Gospel Jesus has told us in different ways as summed up in verse 14 from last week, “**For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.**”

What is it in your life that gives you comfort? What is it that tempts you to find security in it - rather than in God alone? What is the idol of your heart? Perhaps it is money or perhaps it is a person; a spouse or child or brother or sister. Whatever it is, allow this passage of the rich young ruler to be God’s wake up call to you; if there is anything that is keeping you from complete trust or childlike faith and devotion to Christ, it must be removed from your life. As Jesus said last week, without childlike trust in God alone, no one will enter the Kingdom of God.

Now that I have laid a foundation let me read the Word of God. Reading from Luke chapter 18, verses 18 to 30, “**A ruler asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’** ¹⁹ **And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.** ²⁰ **You know the commandments: “Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor**

your father and mother.”²¹ And he said, ‘All these I have kept from my youth.’²² 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.’²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’²⁵ 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.’²⁶ Those who heard it said, ‘Then who can be saved?’²⁷ But he said, ‘What is impossible with man is possible with God.’²⁸ And Peter said, ‘See, we have left our homes and followed you.’²⁹ 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,³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.’” (ESV)

Revealing Questions

The young ruler asks an important question of Jesus. “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” With this question, it is clear that this man has been trusting not in God but in himself and in his works in order to inherit eternal life. He asks, “what must I do” this question exposes he believes he is in control of his destiny and he thinks he can earn his salvation. It is also evident that he has been working hard to earn heaven. He says he has been living by at least five of the Ten Commandments, by the five of the six dealing with one’s responsibilities concerning others. These 5 commandments deal with living and relationships on the horizontal and he is doing well. People saw him as a moral man and because of his wealth he was liked. After all he did not cheat others, he did not murder and he was faithful to his wife. The 5 commandments Jesus gives are for human relationships or horizontal relationships, but they are not the commandments that

are about one's relationship with God or vertical relationship with one's Creator. I want us to understand that in this man's concern for eternal life, he knew that no matter how much he worked in maintaining these commands, he still came up short when it comes to eternal life. There was a nagging truth in his heart that told him, he still lacked something. That is why he came to Jesus to inquire about this very thing. He is asking, "What must I do, in addition to all I have already done, what more must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus responds to this young man asking an important and revealing question, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." In ancient days language terms were used more carefully than today and only God was called good. No rabbi or Pharisee or people in general were called good. This young ruler is connecting Jesus with God, with deity, at least in his words and how he addresses Jesus. Take note of Jesus' response; his response has caused conflict with theologians. Some claiming Jesus was denying his deity. This cannot be the case for it would then be in conflict with the rest of the New Testament. Jesus is not denying his deity at all. He is **not** saying, "Do not call me good because that is for God only and I am not God." No, that is not what he is saying. What Jesus is saying is clear to me, He says, "Why do you call me good when you know that no one is good except God alone, unless you intend by calling Me good to connect me to God and you are acknowledging I am the Messiah." Jesus is forcing the issue and making clear who He is. The people hearing know that Rabbis or Pharisees are not called good, yet the young ruler called Jesus good. Jesus is forcing the young man to be clear; "Are you saying I am from God?" This is the implication of what the ruler just said. Jesus is asking are you willing to act upon what I say? Jesus is implying that if this man truly believes that He is the Christ as he just said he will be eager and ready to do as Jesus instructs. The young man asked Jesus, "Good

Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus wants to know if he is ready and willing to act upon the answer he receives? Unfortunately, we soon discover the young ruler’s address to Jesus, although worded correctly, was empty words without belief. This young ruler in truth is fishing for an answer that will allow him to live as he desires and allow him to pursue his ambitions.

We must be careful that we do not filter the Bible through the lens of our mind and by what we think is acceptable. There are many things in God’s Word that are difficult to apply to our lives. We must never require the Scriptures to meet with our approval and try to reduce it to society’s standards, which many churches are doing. God’s Word is the authority and certainly eternal authority does not come from people’s perceptions. Let me ask, are you willing to do whatever God asks of you or do you want your own desires? If you want what you desire it means you desire to control God! If one calls Jesus good, then they are saying He is God and if they call Jesus good and believe Him to be the Christ, then they must be ready to follow Him at all costs.

I have heard many affirm all day long the fact of Jesus’ deity, Jesus is the Christ. But the proof of the putting; is do they affirm the fact of Jesus’ deity by doing what He tells them to do? Are they obedient?

An Example of Self-Deception

This young ruler is educated and as Jesus states beginning in verse 20, “**You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’**”²¹ And he said, ‘All these I have kept from my youth.’²² 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.’” Jesus wants the young ruler to face reality.

Let us examine the rich young ruler’s perception of himself with the reality of who he really was. His perception was that he should be in good shape when it comes to a right standing with God. He has, as far as he is concerned, done everything God required. However, the problem is this rich ruler is placing his confidence in himself rather than in God. He was self-exalting in that he trusted in himself that he was righteous. This young ruler sounds like the Pharisee two weeks ago in Luke 18, verses 11 and 12, “The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’” This Pharisee was also trusting in himself and all the things he had done would secure God’s favor. Both these men made a very crucial mistake. They thought righteousness was something they earned by doing good things and that based on their good works God would save them. If they had been humble with a childlike faith they would have cried out to God as the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

Jesus mentions 5 of the 10 Commandments that deal with people’s relationships with other people; honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal and do not lie. This young ruler was declaring, just like Little Jack Horner who sat in the corner, “What a good boy am I!”

We also want to take note of the commandments Jesus left out. I take us to Exodus chapter 20. Verse 3 has the first command, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Verse 4, gives us number 2, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image” or idol. Verse 7, the third command, “You shall not take the name of the

LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” Followed by verse 8 with the fourth command, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” In verse 17 is found the tenth command, “You shall not covet.” There was no way this young man could claim he was able to keep these 5 consistently. These deal **not** with works, but with heart and belief and sin against God. We know from verse 23 that he had failed to keep the 10th commandment, “when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich” it is obvious he coveted his money and material wealth more than God. Wealth was this young man’s idol separating him from God. Jesus’ remedy for this young man was to get rid of this idol, this false god of wealth and follow Him.

But to stop here is to miss another point. Jesus goes on to promise the man treasure in heaven if he will follow Him. Reading a verse 29, “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,³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” Notice that Jesus appeals to his desire to possess riches. Our Lord understands all of us desire to possess riches. However, we must not be tricked into thinking that earthly riches are the most valuable assets one can possess. Jesus’ words to this man are, give away the temporary riches of this world, which will burn in time. Seek to possess pure eternal gold and silver of heaven by living in the presence of God.

The need to come to Jesus, to trust him, is not absent from the passage. It is merely defined by reference to the obstacle that stands between the man and God: security found in material wealth. Luke’s observation says it all, the young ruler “when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.” The choice is a painful one; heaven or earth and he refuses to consider it. Grieved at the

options, he chooses his earthly wealth. The question before him was security in temporal wealth or security in God with eternal wealth in the life to come. Luke is clear, the young ruler chose earthly wealth as his god, so, he chose poorly.

Reality Check

It is impossible for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God who loves the things of this world more than God. The young ruler could not stop worshipping his earthly wealth. Reading once again beginning in verse 23, “But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.”²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’²⁵ 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.’” This young ruler was extremely rich, Satan wants people to believe the richer they are the happier they are and yet, history does not support this idea. For example, in 1929 some of America’s richest men leap to their deaths or hung themselves when their riches vanished because they had bought into Satan’s lies. Look at what Luke says; it is the young ruler’s wealth that makes him sad. This man understood clearly the choice he was making. Rather than follow Christ and have treasure in heaven, he chose to serve his earthly wealth and was enslaved to his god; the prince of this world. What is it about money that captures our affections over the treasures of God and heaven? Is it we can touch money? Is it money is for life now? Is it we can obtain money, but the treasure of heaven is given by God? With one path we get glory and with the other God gets the glory!

This truth was clearly taught by Jesus in Luke 16, verse 13, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” All

through history those who allowed the lies of Satan to entice and mixed his lies into their spiritual lives have fallen short. They believed that material wealth is a result of God's blessing and poverty is the result of God's disapproval or curse. This is **not** what the Word of God teaches. Wealth that is **not** used for the kingdom and the glory of God will ensnare people's hearts. Wealth makes us prideful as we acquire it and feel it elevates above others. You cannot take the riches given by God and hoard them and be devoted to God. You may think there are exceptions, but it is really impossible, verse 25 teaches, **"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."** Jesus, here, makes the comparison. The impossibility of a camel going through the eye of a needle shows the impossibility of a rich man clinging to his wealth to enter into God's Kingdom. It is not that it is a struggle, but that it is impossible. No one who finds their security in wealth will enter God's Kingdom.

The Impossible Is Possible

Those who were listening to this conversation between Jesus and the rich young ruler had to be shocked. They concluded that if this moral and upright ruler lacked the qualifications to enter the Kingdom of God, what hope did they have. Taking up our passage at verse 26, **"Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?'"** Please understand that entering into the Kingdom of God means the same as being saved. The people thought entering the Kingdom or being saved was based on their works, so they cry out, **"who can be saved?"** Their question goes past the rich young ruler and asks can anyone, can anyone, be saved? They know that all people have some level of idolatry. All humans fail to only worship God. Because of these weaknesses with all people, who could possibly be saved? This true assessment of mankind by those listening moves us to the reality that there are none who can enter God's Kingdom based on their own merits.

Many truly understood what Jesus was getting at. They saw the shortcomings of the rich young ruler. They agreed with Jesus that if that man could not be justified by works, then they understood that no one could be saved by their own works. So, they ask a critical question, “[who can be saved?](#)”

Jesus understand their confusion, frustration and disillusionment and gives them the truth when he says, “[What is impossible with man is possible with God.](#)” It is impossible for a human to access salvation on their own. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation comes only when God performs a miracle and enables a godless proud self-exalting idolater to let go of his idols and cling to Christ as a small child clings to his mother’s breast. This salvation can only be given by the grace of God. It is impossible for people to obtain salvation on their own. However, with God all things are possible – He is the Creator of every molecule in the universe.

This is the concept we call being born again; spiritually. Nikodemus asked Jesus, “[How can a man be born when he is old?](#)” This in response to Jesus saying in John 3:3, “[Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.](#)” Both Jesus Christ and the Bible, the Word of God, make clear salvation is from God, not man. All those who seek salvation on their own stand condemned. Man wants to earn it himself. He wants the credit and the glory. This rich young ruler and all his morality stood condemned by God. With man salvation is impossible. Man cannot to anything to acquire salvation. Paul gave us a clear understanding of salvation by faith in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 2, verses 8 to 10, “[For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.](#)” This is the clear and straightforward, it is the Word of God.

Blessing Of Sacrifice

As the disciples listened Peter breathes a sigh of relief and says to Jesus in verse 28, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” Jesus responds saying, ²⁹ “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, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” Peter is basically saying we have done what you asked, so, we are all good, we will be able to enter the kingdom. Jesus answer is so they will understand the value of the Kingdom of God. Our eternal inheritance will be infinitely more valuable than anything we give up or sacrifice here on earth. Jesus wants those who believe and are committed to being His followers to understand that they will be reimbursed many times over for anything they sacrifice in their mortal lives for the rewards of eternal heaven.

Do you believe this? If so, the same is true for you and me. Everything one gives up, every idol we lay at the foot of the cross will clear the way for us to follow Jesus more closely and will be rewarded in heaven. Today, the name-it and claim-it, the health and wealth preachers promote idols and are servants of the evil one for they want people to think like the young ruler they can obtain their salvation. They promote the wrong thinking that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing and poverty is God’s curse. Jesus was clear with his direction to the young ruler, “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.” So, my question for each of us today is, “How much do we resemble the rich young ruler?” Are you relying on your own efforts to gain acceptance by God? Do you and I find even a little security in our wealth? If Jesus asked you to sell all you own, give to the poor and follow Him, would you? Do not be too quick to answer, think about it and look

into your heart? Would you be sad to let go of your material wealth? I hope and I pray your answer would be like the man we will study in a few weeks; at the beginning of chapter 19, Jesus “entered Jericho and was passing through.”² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ...⁸ Zacchaeus said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’⁹ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house ...¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.’” (Luke 19:1-2, 8-10) Zacchaeus believed, was obedient and was saved. How about you?

Closing Prayer