

## Luke 18:18-30 The Rich Ruler

Zach Wallace | 8-11-19

Good morning my name is Zach Wallace I'm a pastoral resident here at city life. I'm super nervous, I mean excited, to be here this morning worshipping together. This morning we're continuing through the teachings of Jesus in the gospel of Luke. Jesus is once again teaching us about the kingdom of God and how different it is from the kingdoms we build for ourselves. He's going to answer the questions: how do we enter the kingdom of God, what does it take, and what we get out of it? The answer to all of those questions is him.

### One thing you still lack

18 And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

So Jesus is traveling with his disciples headed to the big city, Jerusalem, and this guy walks up and talks to him. Who is this guy? He's a ruler, if we read ahead we find out that he's extremely rich and Matthew describes him as young in his account of the story. Because we know he is young, we can assume he's probably not a pharisee or a religious leader. He's rich, and his wealth has brought him power in the community. This guy is an influencer. He's a popular dude. So he walks up to Jesus and what does he say

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Good teacher. This is a weird thing for him to call Jesus. It's not just a nice thing to say. People didn't use that kind of language to talk about teachers or address other people. The word he's using would have been reserved to talk about God's perfect goodness. I think he's trying to get on Jesus' good side. He views Jesus as a better teacher than most and goes way over the top in his address to Jesus. It's the "hey dad, you love me right?" before you tell him you wrecked the car. You gotta set yourself up for success. He's pretty concerned about getting a good answer to his question. He's asking how to inherit eternal life - He wants to be sure of his place in the kingdom of God. He's worried that he missed something that he needs to feel confident in his salvation. He knows the law and he knows the rules, but he's nervous that he might miss the boat. I think we can all relate to this kind of question. Whether we acknowledge our need for Jesus, or even the existence of God, it seems normal to ask: is there something I'm missing? It's part of the human condition to search for meaning. Maybe that's why you're here this morning. There's gotta be something bigger than us that can bring our lives meaning and satisfaction. This guy has come to the right place to find the answer, but what he's said has revealed part of his problem. Jesus is going to press on that.

How does Jesus respond? **Why do you call me good** - It's an odd question isn't it? What is Jesus saying? Is he saying that he isn't good? Is he saying that he isn't God? No, that doesn't line up with anything else that Jesus says about himself. He's taking this man's words and turning them around to teach him something. He's directing the man's attention to the source of all goodness and ultimately the salvation and eternal life he's asking how to get.

20 You know the commandments: Jesus starts listing: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" Hopefully most of us would agree that these are good and right things to uphold regardless of our religious stance. It make sense to us that we should treat other people well. Jesus is naming off the ten commandments, but he skips the first four, that talk about how we treat God, and goes straight to

those that relate to the way we treat other people. These are the commandments that I can look around and say, yeah, I'm doing ok on these based on how other people feel about me. Have I killed anyone? Have I cheated on my wife? Do my parents feel cared for? The man says: ["All these I have kept from my youth."](#) He likely believes this to be true. Within a cultural Jewish understanding of these laws, the man probably believes he's in the right on this stuff. He would have been taught exactly what to do and how to treat people in order to be considered righteous. Maybe we feel this way too. After all, I've never murdered anyone. Like the influencer, it may be tempting for us to think we're pretty good people. But Jesus challenges this self-perception. [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 sees straight to the heart of this man and knows that he hasn't kept the other laws either. He tells him three things: [1\) Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, 2\) you will have treasure in heaven 3\) come, follow me.](#)

[1\) Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and](#) - Why would Jesus say this? Is Jesus saying take a vow of poverty in order to get eternal life? That doesn't sound like the gospel! He's pressing on something really important here. To this ancient Jewish man the money, and power, and station he has would signal to him, and the community around him, that he has found favor with God. And this guy is a very wealthy influential person. I think all the stuff that he has is what makes him feel so confident saying: "Yeah, I've kept those commandments. Check out my cool robe, obviously I'm a good person. I wouldn't have all of this stuff if I hadn't kept the commandments." This kind of thinking is here in our culture too. It can be tempting to view our circumstances as evidence of God's favor in our lives. I often look at the successful people around me and assume that they are faithful, honest, hard working people. I find myself judging other people and myself on what I can see. The opposite of this is here too. When my check engine light came on a couple of weeks ago, I caught myself asking God, what did I do to deserve this? I don't believe in Karma, but it can be easy to let a little bit of that what goes around comes around mentality slip into our worldview. That my circumstances, good or bad, are a result of my actions. If we run with that belief system, it can be easy to believe the same thing about our futures and our place in the kingdom of God. I've been pretty good and I have my life together, so things are going to work out alright for me. I think Jesus is saying get rid of the things you love more than me, the things that make you feel secure. If we find ourselves asking the question: "Do I have to give up all of my money to enter the kingdom of God," we're missing the point. Maybe the answer is yes. If Jesus stood before you, and he saw your heart, what would he ask you to give up? Your career? Living in the greatest city in the world? Financial security? Your future? Your kids' futures? Being liked? I really want people to like me. Sometimes it's easier to feel ok about myself if it seems like other people feel ok about me. So I try to be cool. I try to be funny. I want people to think I'm smart. I buy cool denim shirts and boots and get tattoos to try to look like someone that I would think is cool and want to be friends with. There's nothing wrong with any of these things, just like it wasn't wrong for this guy to have a lot of money and it's not wrong to like your job or care about your kids' futures. The problems come when we care more about those things than we do about Jesus. When we make them the things that define us. Jesus is asking us to give it up.

Jesus knows he is asking a lot of this man and of us, but he's promising something as well...

[2\) you will have treasure in heaven](#) - Let's look at a short parable that Jesus gives in [Matthew 13:44](#) ["The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and](#)

covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Jesus paints a picture here that living in the kingdom of God and experiencing all of the good promises and gifts that are a part of it should lead us to joyfully give up anything and everything to partake in it. The man in this parable sees the value of the treasure and stops at nothing to get it. Jesus is presenting the rich ruler here with the same chance. He is offering treasure in heaven and eternal salvation in the kingdom of God. The treasure is Jesus himself and all of the good things that come with being in right relationship with God. And Jesus invites him now...

### 3) [And come follow me](#)

This isn't just walking behind him on a trip. This is a call to discipleship. To follow Jesus' example and his rules. Before we follow Jesus, we have to view him as better than anything else. The ruler has to give up his money, I have to give up caring what people think of me. Are there paths you're not willing to follow Jesus on? Maybe you're all for following Jesus as long as it takes you up a few rungs in your career and keeps you here in Austin. Maybe you'll follow Jesus as long as it doesn't cut into your budget too much or take up too much of your weekends. How will you respond to Jesus' call to follow him? How did the influencer respond.

### **He became very sad**

[23 But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.](#)

Upon hearing what Jesus is demanding of him, the man becomes very sad.

This isn't just a bummer; the word here means that he is deeply grieved. He is very rich and he loves his money and what the money has and will provide him. He wants it more than Jesus. What was that thing that you love more than Jesus? As an old Puritan said: "God does not break all hearts in the same way." We are all different. We all have different things that we look to for comfort and hope, but Jesus is calling all of us to look to him. I can remember a time in high school that I was in a relationship with a girl that was very much not honoring God. I knew it was wrong. I felt so much guilt. I remember praying, and fighting, and even journaling the words: "God, I know that this is not what you want for me, but I'm sorry, I'm not ready to give this up." I was grieved by my sin, but I didn't want to let it go. What do you need to let go? Talk about that in your fight clubs and city groups. Confess to one another the things that we are holding more tightly than Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you and show you your heart. If you don't have those kinds of friendships and relationships like a fight club or a city group in your life I would love to help you find them and build them. We all need help. How does Jesus respond to this man's grief?

[24 Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! So the ruler is sad, but he doesn't do anything. He had so much and he wasn't willing to give it up. He couldn't imagine that life could be good without his wealth. Jesus began his ministry in Mark 1 saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."](#) So Jesus has said that coming into his kingdom requires repentance. Jesus wants so much more for us than to feel conviction. He wants us to repent! We can't just look at our sin and get sad, we need to turn and look upon Christ! How do we do that? What can we do to make this change happen in us? What does Jesus say next?

### **What is impossible with man is possible with 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 isn't a very complicated metaphor. The camel here is a camel and the needle is a needle. Jesus takes the biggest animal these ancient people would have seen and describes it going through one of the smallest holes they would all be very familiar with. Jesus is

saying very emphatically that it is impossible! It's not just really hard for us to earn our place with God, there's nothing we can do to change our own hearts.

26 Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

The people around him are confused and they're getting worried. The rich ruler has money, power, and station. Their understanding would be that these things are blessings from God for his righteousness. If this 'good' dude, who follows the laws and has the cash to buy whatever sacrifices he needs can't and won't be found righteous before the Lord and enter into his kingdom, what hope is there for any of us? God is perfect and holy and we are very much not. We all have something that we lack. No matter how hard we try, it is impossible for any of us to be good enough to earn our way into God's kingdom. They're getting it. They're feeling the rub of their brokenness. Jesus has their attention with the hopelessness of their situation.

27 But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

Jesus reminds them of the words of the Lord himself in the old testament from Genesis, Job, and Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 32:27 "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?"

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Jesus points us back to his first remark to the rich man. "No one is good except God alone." It is impossible to be good outside of the goodness of God. Jesus shows us our need and points to the solution. Him! This is why Jesus has come to the earth. He came to make a way for us to enter the kingdom of God. We can never do enough or be enough to earn our place there. Jesus can and he did. He died on a cross and he rose from the grave. We don't all have the same story of sacrificing the same thing we love, but we do have the same Christ through whom ALL things are possible.

28 And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you."

As usual, Peter says what I'm thinking: But we're good right? We left all of our stuff behind to follow you. Jesus encourages them that yes, they have submitted and followed him. They left behind their relationships and families to be his disciples for the sake of the kingdom of God and they will receive the inheritance of eternal life. Even though the disciples don't fully understand what they're in for when it comes to following Jesus, he continues to have grace for them as they follow him. We don't have to figure out all of our problems before we follow Jesus. We just have to look upon him and believe that he is better and follow him.

### **Conclusion**

What are you loving more than Jesus? What could Jesus ask you to give up that would grieve you? Are you asking the Spirit to reveal those idols to you and confessing them to your community? Are you stopping at conviction and confession? Sometimes it can feel like just admitting something or saying it out loud has solved the problem. I can apologize to Grace for not putting a new trash bag in the trash can as many times as I want, but it means nothing to her, because I have never once, replaced the bag when I take the trash out. Where have you apologized to God but not changed? Where do you settle for conviction but fall short of repentance? How can we help one another stop obsessing over our sin neither lovingly nor scornfully, and turn to look upon Christ and pursue him.

There is hope and joy in Jesus. Through his life, death, and resurrection, the impossible has been made possible. Look to him; cling to him! Respond with abandon, for he is good and his steadfast love endures forever. He asks much of us, but he is so much better. Give it all up to him, repent, and follow him.