

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Rich Ruler

Luke 18:18-30

Rev. Freddy Fritz

July 12, 2015

The Rich Ruler

Scripture

Ruth Burke of Columbus, Ohio overheard at a restaurant two women at the next table telling about a little girl who had gone to the zoo with her Sunday school class. There, she had spent an excessive amount of time at the camels' enclosure. She apparently wanted to see some really small camels. Her teacher finally made sense of her fascination when the little girl asked, "Where do they keep the ones who can go through the eye of a needle?"¹

She was, of course, referring to one of Jesus' famous comments in a conversation he had with a rich ruler. This well-known conversation is in fact recorded in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30).

Let's read about Jesus and the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-30:

¹⁸ And 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

¹ See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1997/march/3091.html>.

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." (Luke 18:18-30)

Introduction

The theme of Luke 18, which we have been studying for several weeks, has to do with entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus has been teaching what is required to enter into the kingdom of God.

Earlier, Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. In that parable Jesus illustrated two approaches to God and entrance into his kingdom. One was the right approach, and the other was the wrong approach.

Then, in Luke 18:15-17, Jesus went on to teach that humble dependence, as illustrated in the lives of young children, was a prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom of God.

It was at this point that a rich ruler asked Jesus one of the greatest questions ever asked in the entire Bible. He asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

Lesson

The analysis of Jesus and the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-30 teaches us what is required to receive eternal life.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Question of the Ruler (18:18)
2. The Response of Jesus (18:19-20)
3. The Claim of the Ruler (18:21)
4. The Command of Jesus (18:22)
5. The Sorrow of the Ruler (18:23)

6. The Comment of Jesus (18:24-25)
7. The Question of the Listeners (18:26)
8. The Answer of Jesus (18:27)
9. The Statement of Peter (18:28)
10. The Promise of Jesus (18:29-30)

I. The Question of the Ruler (18:18)

First, look at the question of the ruler.

While Jesus was teaching about the kingdom of God, and the requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God, **a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (18:18).

Luke noted that this man was a **ruler**. Commentators are divided about whether he was a **ruler** in the synagogue or a **ruler** in the civil sphere. Since the Scripture does not clarify what kind of **ruler** he was, I don’t think it matters, except to note that he was a man of influence, authority, and position. Moreover, we also know that he was “extremely rich,” because Luke tells us so in verse 23. And finally, we know from Matthew’s Gospel that he was young (Matthew 19:20). So, this man is often called “the rich, young ruler.”

Now, I want you to notice two things about the question of the ruler. First, he went to the right person. Everyone has a question about eternal life because God has “put eternity into man’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). But, far too often people go to the wrong religion, the wrong church, or the wrong teacher to find an answer to their question. But not this ruler. He went to Jesus. He went to the source of all truth to get an answer.

And second, he asked the right question. He asked, **“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (18:18). As I mentioned earlier, this is one of the greatest questions ever asked in the entire Bible. Is anything more important than knowing how to receive eternal life?

The ruler's question concerning the requirement for eternal life reveals a spiritual hunger that was not being satisfied by his wealth, influence, authority, or position.

Perhaps you have a spiritual hunger in your soul. You are not satisfied with what you have, and you also want to know the requirement for inheriting eternal life. Well, let's move on!

II. The Response of Jesus (18:19-20)

Second, notice the response of Jesus.

Jesus challenged the ruler's address to him. **And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone"** (18:19). The ruler wanted to honor Jesus by calling him **good**. However, Jesus in turn wanted to shock the ruler because he realized that the ruler had a defective understanding of goodness. No one is good in comparison to God. The ruler was making the mistake that people commonly make today, and that is to compare ourselves to one another. However, the ultimate comparison is not to one another but rather to God, who is the only one who is truly good.

Then Jesus went on to say to the ruler 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.'**" Jesus listed five of the ten commandments. These come from the Second Table of the Law.

It is somewhat surprising that Jesus responded this way, isn't it? Earlier, Jesus taught that entrance into the kingdom of God is by humble dependence upon the grace of God. Now he seems to be suggesting that one could enter the kingdom of God by obeying **the commandments**.

III. The Claim of the Ruler (18:21)

Third, look at the claim of the ruler.

The ruler **said, “All these I have kept from my youth”** (18:21). He believed that he had been able to obey the commandments of God. Clearly, the ruler had a superficial understanding of obeying the commandments. He did not realize that getting angry with one’s brother was murder, or that lust was adultery, according to Jesus (Matthew 5:21-30).

IV. The Command of Jesus (18:22)

Fourth, notice the command of Jesus.

Jesus did not challenge the ruler on his shallow understanding of the law. However, **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”** (18:22). Here Jesus masterfully exposed the man’s idol, which was his wealth. He loved his riches. He enjoyed everything that his money could buy. Although he had a spiritual vacuum in his life and was asking a question about how to inherit eternal life, Jesus knew that in order to inherit eternal life, one has to set any and every thing aside in order to follow him. Would this ruler be willing to get rid of that thing which he loved in order to follow Jesus?

Are you, dear friend, willing to get rid of any and every thing that you love more than Jesus in order to follow Jesus? Are you willing to give up wealth, influence, position, authority, a relationship, drugs, career, fame, and so on? Is there any thing that stands between you and Jesus that you are unwilling to give up? You will never know true joy and peace in your life until you surrender everything and follow Jesus.

V. The Sorrow of the Ruler (18:23)

Fifth, look at the sorrow of the ruler.

How did the ruler respond? Luke said in verse 23 that

when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. You know, we never hear of this man again. Apparently, he lived out the rest of days enjoying his riches but when he died, he went to an eternity in hell.

VI. The Comment of Jesus (18:24-25)

Sixth, notice the comment of Jesus.

Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (18:24). Jesus knew how difficult it is to surrender everything, especially wealth, in order to follow him.

And then Jesus went on to make his famous comment in verse 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.”** There are all kinds of suggestions for what **“the eye of a needle”** is. I remember hearing that there was a gate in the city wall in Jerusalem that was rather small. In order for a trader and his camel to go through **the eye of a needle** he had to take all the goods off the camel so that the camel could just squeeze through without anything to weigh it down. The point was that in order to enter heaven we need to get rid of everything in our lives that will keep us from entering heaven. Well, while the point may be true, the problem is that there is no such gate in the city of Jerusalem!

Jesus was speaking hyperbolically when he spoke of **a camel going through the eye of a needle**. Frankly, it is ludicrous to think that it could be done. But, according to Jesus, **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.**

VII. The Question of the Listeners (18:26)

Seventh, look at the question of the listeners.

Understandably, **those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”** (18:26). Clearly, they were shocked! And their question was completely understandable, especially when one realizes that in that culture wealth was a sign of God’s blessing. People believed that rich people were blessed by God. And so when Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, they were stunned. Surely, no one could be saved?

VIII. The Answer of Jesus (18:27)

Eighth, notice the answer of Jesus.

But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (18:27). This is one of the great answers of Jesus in the entire Word of God. Here we must understand that salvation is clearly a work of God and not of man. God saves sinners! We do not save ourselves. We are incapable of obeying the commandments of God perfectly. No matter how hard we try, we will never perfectly obey the commandments of God. That is why we must, with the tax collector, call on the mercy of God.

IX. The Statement of Peter (18:28)

Ninth, look at the statement of Peter.

And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you” (18:28). I almost sense Peter questioning Jesus to see if they were in the camp. Had he and the other disciples done what was required in order to inherit eternal life?

X. The Promise of Jesus (18:29-30)

And tenth, notice the promise of Jesus.

It is such a precious promise. In verses 29-30 Jesus **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.”

You see, Peter and the other disciples, received eternal life because they let nothing stand between them and following Jesus. They were willing to give up everything in order follow him, who is life eternal itself. They were willing to sacrifice everything in life for something better in eternity.

In October of 1781, General Cornwallis marched his British troops into Yorktown. The patriots to the south had wreaked havoc on his redcoat army, and he was hoping to rendezvous with the British Navy on Chesapeake Bay.

American and French troops, however, anticipating Cornwallis’s plan, pounded them with cannon fire, while the French fleet cut off escape by sea. The British found themselves trapped.

Thomas Nelson, then governor of Virginia and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was fighting with the patriots firing the cannons in Yorktown. Gathering the men, he pointed to a beautiful brick home.

“That is my home,” he explained. “It is the best one in town. And, because of that, Lord Cornwallis has almost certainly set up the British headquarters inside.”

And he told the American artillerymen to open fire on his own house.

They did. As the story goes, the very first cannonball shot at Mr. Nelson’s house sailed right through the large dining room window and landed on the table where several British officers were eating.

It is one thing for a man to talk about freedom. It is quite another to destroy his own home to help make that freedom a reality. Nelson understood, however, that to hold on to his current life would mean forfeiting the life he was so desperately

seeking. A life of true freedom would cost him the stuff of his present life. It was a small price to pay.

On October 19, as the British troops surrendered, the Redcoat band played the song, “The World Turned Upside Down,” The song was apt. An army that couldn’t afford to put shoes on its soldiers’ feet had just defeated the world’s greatest super-power.

But how can you thwart an army willing to sacrifice everything they currently have for something infinitely better waiting on the other side?²

Similarly, Jesus promises something infinitely better on the other side to those who are willing to sacrifice everything they currently have. The ruler was unwilling to do that. He would not part with his riches. And so he received something infinitely worse by spending eternity in hell.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus and the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-30, we should turn from any and every thing that would prevent us from following wholeheartedly after Jesus.

Tim Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, NY, said this about following Jesus:

I’ve heard people say, “I’m checking out Christianity, but I also understand Christians can’t do this and the Bible says you’re supposed to do that. You’re supposed to love the poor or you’re supposed to give up sex outside of marriage. I can’t accept that.” So people want to come to Christ with a list of conditions.

But the real question is this: Is there a God who is the source of all beauty and glory and life, and if knowing Christ will fill your life with his goodness and power and joy, so that

² Bill Bennett, *The American Patriot’s Almanac* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008), 408.

you would live with him in endless ages with his life increasing in you every day? If that's true, you wouldn't say things like, "You mean, I have to give up ___ (like sex or something else)."

Let's say you have a friend who is dying of some terrible disease. So you take him to the doctor and the doctor says, "I have a remedy for you. If you just follow my advice you will be healed and you will live a long and fruitful life, but there's only one problem: while you're taking my remedy you can't eat chocolate." Now what if your friend turned to you and said, "Forget it. No chocolate? What's the use of living? I'll follow the doctor's remedy, but I will also keep eating chocolate."

If Christ is really God, then all the conditions are gone. To know Jesus Christ is to say, "Lord, anywhere your will touches my life, anywhere your Word speaks, I will say, 'Lord, I will obey. There are no conditions anymore.' " If he's really God, he can't just be a supplement. We have to come to him and say, "Okay, Lord, I'm willing to let you start a complete reordering of my life."³

The ruler was unwilling to do that.

But what about you? Are you willing to turn from any and every thing that would prevent you from following wholeheartedly after Jesus? Are you willing to come to Jesus and say, "Lord, I will obey. There are no conditions anymore"? Are you willing to say, "Okay, Lord, I'm willing to let you start a complete reordering of my life"?

If you are willing to turn from your sin and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, do so right now. Do not let another day go by before you surrender everything and follow Jesus Christ. Amen.

³ See <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2014/december/5122214.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

O Lord Jesus Christ, two millennia ago you had a conversation with a rich, young ruler. You challenged him about the idol in his life. You told him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. But he did not turn from his idol and follow you.

O Jesus, if there is anyone here today who is willing to turn from his or her sin and trust you, and follow you, will you grant that person repentance and faith? Will you make true your statement in that person's life that what is impossible with men is possible with God?

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!